

North Carolina Advisory Council on Cannabis

Co-Chairs:

Lawrence H. Greenblatt, State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer, NCDHHS

Matt Scott, District Attorney, Prosecutorial District 20

Meeting Minutes

July 29, 2025, 1:30-5:00pm

The Albemarle Building, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh NC

Attendees

Council Members Present – David W. Alexander; Arthur E. Apolinario; Joshua C. Batten; Proxy for John R. Bell; Carrie L. Brown; Patrick Brown; Mark M. Ezzell; Kris Gardner; Lawrence H. Greenblatt; Proxy for Brian Harris; Zack A. Hawkins; Daniel Hirschman; Colonel Freddy L. Johnson, Jr.; Michael Lamb; Kimberly McDonald; Ed McLenaghan as proxy for Anca Grozav; Patrick Oglesby; Forrest G. Parker; Lillie L. Rhodes; Matt Scott; Gary H. Sikes; Kandie D. Smith; Keith Stone; Joy Strickland; Missy P. Welch

Council Members Absent - Bill P. Rabon, Deonte Thomas

Guest Speakers – Kaycee Deen, Agency Legal Consultant for North Carolina DHHS, Division of Public Health; Josh Batten, Assistant Director of the NC Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) Division; Gillian Schauer, Executive Director of the Cannabis Regulators Association (CANNRA) via virtual attendance

Agenda

- I. Council Overview & Background
- II. Presentation – Legal Landscape, Kaycee Deen
- III. Presentation – North Carolina Landscape, Josh Batten
- IV. Presentation – National Landscape, Gillian Schauer
- V. Discussion of Next Steps for North Carolina

Presentation - Legal Landscape

- Definitions: Cannabis = all products derived from Cannabis sativa. THC = psychoactive; CBD = generally non-intoxicating. Marijuana vs. Hemp distinction based on 0.3% THC threshold from the 2018 Farm Bill.
- Farm Bill regulatory gaps: (1) THC measured by dry weight → edibles can far exceed intoxicating doses. (2) THC-A converts to THC when heated. (3) Synthetic/semi-synthetic cannabinoids not covered.
- Regulatory gaps allow intoxicating hemp products to be widely sold.
- North Carolina: Hemp-derived products are legal but minimally regulated. Recreational and medical cannabis remain illegal under state law. Tribal exception: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) opened Great Smoky Cannabis Company in 2024.
- Federal outlook: Marijuana remains Schedule I. HHS recommended rescheduling to Schedule III, which could ease research barriers and taxation, but federal action is stalled.

Presentation - North Carolina Landscape

- ALE oversees alcohol, lottery, and tobacco laws; lacks authority and resources for cannabis.

- Challenges: No licensing requirements or database of sellers. Thousands of unregulated shops; no inspection authority. Lab testing expensive (\$80–130 per test). Many COAs (certificates of analysis) fabricated or inaccurate.
- Findings: ~92% of seized 'hemp' products tested as marijuana. Rapid growth in THC beverages (5–200 mg THC per can). Products often mimic candy/snack brands → risk to children. Vape shop proliferation; trend away from nicotine toward THC. Reports of ER visits from accidental ingestion.
- Enforcement focus: youth protection, consumer safety, complaint-driven investigations.
- Additional concerns: Kratom-infused drinks, organized crime with 'whippets,' high THC potency compared to past decades.

Presentation – National Landscape

- Cannabis markets: Legacy/illicit (interstate, untaxed), state-regulated marijuana markets (intrastate, taxed, regulated), hemp market (federally legal, interstate commerce, loosely regulated).
- Lessons from other states: Consumer safety is a priority in all states. Other states include other priorities too (e.g., equity, market/economic growth, medical patient access and safety, etc.). Need flexible statutes and baseline data collection. Risks of patchwork local opt-outs that can create market and access gaps and impact the illicit market. Education should begin early, even before tax revenues are available. Market design choices shape outcomes. Important to consider cannabinoids that come from hemp as well in regulatory frameworks.
- Best practices: Clear product standards (THC concentration caps). Mandatory lab testing, packaging, and labeling requirements. Consumer education campaigns with harm reduction focus. Single-agency oversight recommended, with cross-agency support.

Action Items / Next Steps

- Define core priorities for NC cannabis regulation (safety, public health, equity, market stability).
- Research and compare regulatory models from other states.
- Collect baseline data on current cannabis/hemp use and market trends.
- Consider establishing a licensing/oversight framework for hemp-derived products.
- Explore public education campaigns on cannabis products and risks.
- Continue engagement with stakeholders, including law enforcement, healthcare, industry, and community groups.

Adjournment

Meeting concluded at 5:00 PM.

Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, September 30