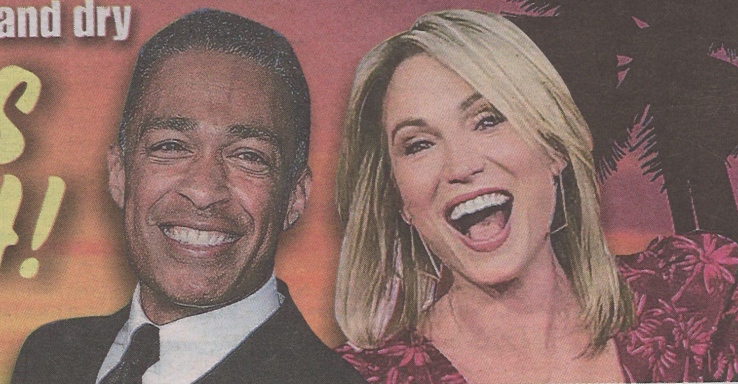




How 'GMA' lovers left spouses high and dry

## ANCHORS AWEIGH!

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# WHAT NYC nonprofits will sell weed — while they treat drug addicts ARE THEY SMOKING?



Three large nonprofits — Housing Works, Center for Community Alternatives and the Doe Fund — won state licenses to peddle recreational marijuana, despite providing services to help people get off drugs and alcohol. "It's just mind-blowing," said Assemblyman Michael Reilly, who voted against the 2021 bill legalizing recreational weed.

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By MELISSA KLEIN  
and MARY KAY LINGE

Their reputations for drug treatment may go up in smoke.

Three of the nonprofits awarded state licenses to legally sell weed ironically offer substance-abuse services — or mandate sobriety for participants.

Among them are Housing Works, a sprawling \$145 million organization which provides counseling and “mental health and medication assisted treatment to help you in your recovery journey,” according to its website.

The \$12 million Center for Community Alternatives, which also received a marijuana license, runs a substance-abuse treatment program.

The massive Doe Fund, which took in \$65 million in 2020, is a third-license holder — and demands that those in its housing/work program “commit to maintaining their sobriety.”

“It’s just mind-blowing,” said Assemblyman Michael Reilly (R-SI), who voted against the 2021 bill that legalized recreational pot in New York. “These organizations have committed to the community that they would help prevent addiction and help people heal but here they are, getting a license to sell recreational marijuana, which alters your mind and in essence takes away your sobriety.”

Kevin Sabet, president and CEO of the advocacy group Smart Approaches to Marijuana, which promotes a “health-first” approach to pot policy, called it “strange” that the nonprofits would want to get into the weed business.

“Selling today’s highly potent marijuana and promoting the use of these intoxicants — which is very different from Woodstock weed in its strength — to me is very contradictory to the missions of these good organizations,” Sabet said. “Now they’re going to be tainted by essentially becoming legal drug dealers.”

The three nonprofits are among eight that got the state recreational marijuana sales licenses last month.

The state also gave licenses to 28 individuals who were “justice involved” — meaning they either had a past pot conviction or a family member who had one.

Nonprofits were eligible for the licenses if they served convicts or those who were formerly incarcerated and had at least one “justice involved” person on their boards, among other requirements.

The Brooklyn-based Housing Works, which was founded to help those with HIV and AIDS and later expanded to serve a broader population, has said it could get its weed dispensary up and running as soon as this month and was looking to rent a 4,000-square-foot space in lower Manhattan.



**HIGHS & LOWS:** Three nonprofits that provide sobriety services, two being the Doe Fund (left) and Housing Works (above), have now been granted licenses to sell pot — a seeming contradiction.

Helayne Selzman

The organization offers substance abuse treatment at centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn and embraces a “harm reduction” philosophy.

Housing Works, which also operates a chain of thrift stores, is already advertising for weed workers — including “budtenders” who could earn up to \$20.40 an hour.

The job description says budtenders will “work closely with Management to improve personal product knowledge of marijuana strains, (indicas, sativas, hybrids), edibles, extracts, and current products on the market.”

A Housing Works rep did not return requests for comment. But CEO Charles King told Politico that it wanted to employ “jus-

tice-involved” people at his shop and create a vocational training program so they could open their own weed businesses.

He said the organization wanted to expand to open more weed stores with the possibility of “on-site” consumption.

Charles Fain Lehman, of the Manhattan Institute, said the Housing Works plan seemed “odd” — especially an on-site consumption parlor.

“If you have a high-risk population, if you have people with a history of drug use, people with a history of impulsive behavior you want to create as few opportunities as possible for them to engage in drug use and other misbehaviors,” he said.

A rep for the Center for Com-

munity Alternatives, a criminal justice reform group with sites in Brooklyn and upstate, did not return a request for comment.

Its Crossroads to Recovery outpatient program in Brooklyn offers counseling, individualized treatment plans, and referrals to community-based services, according to its website.

The Doe Fund, which provides services to the homeless and ex-convicts, also did not respond to a request for comment.

Its 12-month Ready, Willing & Able residential work program has participants commit to maintaining their sobriety as they get housing and earn money cleaning Big Apple streets. The program says it offers “sobriety support.”

All of the weed businesses will be run by separate for-profit entities linked to the nonprofits, which are not eligible for money from a \$200 million state pot fund.

Erica Ford, the founder of LIFE Camp, a Queens-based violence prevention organization which also got a marijuana license, said that running a pot dispensary would provide a revenue stream for her group to continue its work. She declined to provide an estimate for how much green she thought it would bring in.

The organization, which took in \$2.5 million in 2020, needed to raise money to open its store, but might start with a delivery business, which the state allows, Ford said.

She said selling marijuana would offer a safer alternative to the illegal sale of weed, some of which is laced with fentanyl.

“People who are doing this to our kids, we don’t want them in our neighborhood,” Ford said. “We don’t want them in our city. We don’t want them in our state. Period.”

Marijuana is expected to generate more than \$1.25 billion in revenue for the state over the next six years.

The pot sales will be taxed at 13% with 9% going to the state and 4% to local governments. Of the state revenue, 20% will go to drug treatment programs, 40% to education and 40% to a new “Community Grants Reinvestment Fund.”