

Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition Signs Community Benefits Agreement With Proposed Zen Leaf Bucktown Dispensary

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CHICAGO – Community activists with the Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition announced that they have entered into a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with dispensary operator, Zen Leaf, for a proposed adult-use dispensary at 1720 N. Damen Ave. in Bucktown. Zen Leaf and the Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition signed the agreement in order to ensure that the new dispensary will provide economic benefits and opportunities for the communities most disproportionately harmed by the War on Drugs, a key social equity goal of Illinois' historic adult use cannabis law.

The state's social equity program is focused on ensuring that communities historically impacted by the criminalization of cannabis have an opportunity to participate and benefit in the newly legalized industry.

“By signing the CBA, Zen Leaf has taken concrete steps to provide economic opportunity to those who've been most harmed by the War on Drugs” said Doug Kelly, President of the Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition.

As part of the agreement, Zen Leaf Bucktown has pledged to employ, hire and buy from individuals and organizations living in one of the state's defined Disproportionately Impacted Areas or who would otherwise qualify as a Social Equity Applicant. The Zen Leaf Bucktown binding pledge with the Coalition includes:

A commitment to hire at least 50 percent of dispensary employees from Disproportionately Impacted Areas;

All employees will be provided a living wage of \$16 per hour as they start their careers in the legal cannabis industry;

Endow community organizations and initiatives to benefit disproportionately impacted communities with \$125,000 in grants;

Procure at least 10% dispensary products or services from state certified M/W/DBE's or social equity licensed businesses;

Establish a training and career development program for individuals living in Disproportionately Impacted Areas; and Produce and host “Know Your Rights” educational events and participate in National Expungement Week.

“Progress is a collective effort, and it happens one step at a time,” said Renzo Mejia, senior vice president for Zen Leaf. “We are proud to enter this agreement and thank the Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition for their groundbreaking organizing of Illinois' adult-use industry.”

The Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition will only recommend approval of proposed dispensaries that make an enforceable and public commitment to diversity, inclusion and economic opportunity for those disproportionately harmed by the failed war on drugs. The Coalition believes that a signed CBA demonstrates which dispensary operators should be permitted in Chicago.

“We hope more dispensary operators will make a binding commitment like the team behind Zen Leaf Bucktown,” said attorney Akele Parnell of Chicago Lawyers'

Committee for Civil Rights, which is representing the Coalition in negotiations with dispensary operators.

This is the second CBA the coalition has been able to negotiate with a dispensary operator. They are hopeful that more operators will follow this blueprint and sign binding pledges.

“We are very proud of the years of organizing we’ve done to advance equity in Illinois’ cannabis industry, and to sign an agreement with Zen Leaf,” said Peter Contos, Advocacy Coordinator of the Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition. “We’re making progress one agreement at a time.”

The Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition is a group of Chicagoans and nonprofits that have witnessed first-hand how much the War on Drugs has taken from Black and Latinx communities. We are organizers who work at the intersection of the cannabis industry, racial equity, and reparative justice. We come from a diverse range of impacted communities across Chicago to demand accountability and justice at a time of moral crisis in this field. More info at www.cannabisequityil.org # CannabisCBA #CannabisEquityIL
About Zen Leaf:

Zen Leaf is a dispensary brand dedicated to enriching its patients’ quality of life by providing safe access to lab-tested, premium medical cannabis products. Zen Leaf stewards the communities in which it operates and creates employment opportunities for its residents. Zen Leaf facilities ensure an exceptional shopping experience with an emphasis on attentive, individualized patient care. Zen Leaf puts forth cannabis an extensive menu of medical cannabis products, including flower, concentrates, edibles, tablets and topicals, in precision-dosed THC and CBD formulations, from the most coveted cultivators/processors in Illinois. Stay tuned for more details of Zen Leaf’s ongoing activities at www.zenleafdispensaries.com and via social media @zenleafdispensaries.