



Cannabis is one of the most rapidly growing new industries across the country today. Estimates number its workforce as already over 200,000. In New York, the industry has been shaped by two key pieces of state legislation. In 2014, it passed the Compassionate Care Act (CCA) to authorize 10 retailers of medical marijuana approved so far by the state. Then, in 2021, Gov. Kathy Hochul signed into law the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) to decriminalize adult cannabis use and set regulations for the adult-use market.

One labor union, Local 338 of the RWDSU/UFCW, recognized early the opportunity to add its voice to the legislative process to include labor protections in the new legislation. It has now successfully organized nine of the 10 licensed cannabis companies and has negotiated first contracts with most of them that raise wages and benefits significantly.

Saul Guerrero is the Director of Cannabis Services for Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW, a union headquartered in Long Island. Born in Manhattan of Peruvian/Ecuadorian parents, he was educated in business administration at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), while he pursued an early career in retail clothing. Starting at The Gap in 1997, over 10 years he rose into the managerial ranks. That experience sparked rising concern over the working conditions of retail employees, which led him into a now 16-year career in the union movement. Local 338, his home for the past half-decade, supported his enrollment in the Labor Studies Programs of Hofstra and Cornell. On Sept. 26th, he spoke with Gregory DeFreitas.


**Q: What was your background before joining the labor movement? Were you from a union household?**

**SG:** Not really. My father was from Peru and put himself through college here to become an engineer. But he was also a musician. My mother is from Ecuador and was a dancer when she met my dad. I studied business at first in college, as I worked at The Gap. I went

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legal market is ready to go. Right now, the OCM (Office of Cannabis Management) Is still working on the regulations as to how the adult use market is going to work.<sup>1</sup>

They only started on August 25th with the applications for the CAURD applicants (Conditional Adult Use Retail Dispensary). Those are the people that have been affected by the War on Drugs and have nonviolent cannabis convictions. They are able to now apply to be owners. And the State is actually going to subsidize your dispensary. So if you are a winner of a CAURD application, the state would actually build you a dispensary, and when it's done they'll just give you the keys and be like: this is yours, and you can run it! However, it is going to be like a franchise, for lack of a better term. The state is going to make them all the same and you gg (u g).4 (-23.1 (a)-0.99 .8 (h)rmms and be lg to mse a wysaers.2 (a)-20.6 (r3m m-11 (.2 (a)-20.7.220.6 (n)1.1 (5m (.2 (a)-20.31.1 1.8 a)0 (y) (s)1.3e s) (o)20 (w)-5 ( )]TJ0.126n07(-1 (n)1.1 (d t)-15.8 (h)-1.8 (e S)7.5 (t)-23.11.8 76(u 0.6 )-23



negotiations. It's because they have a Cannabis Association and I'm sure that they're talking with each other and trying to see how they can make it harder.

Another of the biggest challenges are the logistics. We are organizing the whole State and sometimes us people from either Long Island or the boroughs, when we think of upstate, we only think about Westchester, we think about Yonkers. But when you're in Utica, you're just in Central New York, and then you have Plattsburg and Buffalo. We organize everywhere, so logistically sometimes we're driving for hours because we have a meeting with workers in Syracuse to kind of keep the flame going. Then we have to go meet people in Chestertown after work at five, but it takes three hours just to get there.

We have hired new organizing reps upstate and they're coming with me on Wednesday. We hired them there purposely, so that we could have more access to our members. But you know, they are new organizers. So right now we're going through the motions of training them, and it's going to be a couple more months before they're on their own. But once we have that, then we have a full team of four organizers that will be chugging around the upstate area. And as we continue to grow (no pun intended with cannabis) we hope to have several thousand workers in the upstate area. And we might have to add even more reps!

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