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OCM LAUNCHES STATEWIDE LISTEN & LEARN SERIES TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE AND TRUSTED ADULTS ON CANNABIS EDUCATION

Series Aims to Close Gaps in Evidence-Based Cannabis Education for, Young People, Educators, Parents, and Caregivers Across New York State

Listening Sessions Will Run May-August in Schools, Libraries, and Community Hubs Across the State

OCM Will Use Community Input to Shape Future Public Education Focused on Youth Safety and Informed Decision Making

NEW YORK, NY — The New York State Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) announced the launch of a new statewide "Listen & Learn" series focused on engaging young people and the trusted adults in their lives – including parents, mentors, educators and caregivers — to better shape the future of cannabis education in New York. As the legal cannabis market continues to grow, OCM recognizes the urgent need for youth-centered messaging that helps young people navigate the realities of cannabis in their communities and make informed choices that best protect their health.

The series will feature private in-person listening sessions across the state from May through August, hosted in accessible locations by community-based youth serving organizations.

"Education rooted in engagement is not only meaningful—it's more effective," **said Felicia A.B. Reid, Acting Executive Director of the New York State Office of Cannabis Management.** "It's one thing to know that cannabis use can be detrimental to youth development—but it's another to recognize that young people don't always have access to responsible education or information about cannabis. With 'Listen & Learn', OCM is creating space for young people and their communities to speak honestly, ask

questions, and from their feedback, identify information opportunities, resources, and needs for local supports. These listening sessions are another step in New York building the thoughtful, evidence-based substance use resources that youth and communities need."

The initiative aims to capture real insights from young people in middle and high schools and engage trusted adults in open dialogue about current perceptions, information gaps, and effective ways to discuss cannabis and health. The conversations will help inform OCM's next public education initiatives and the development of tailored educational resources designed with young people in mind. Participants will also explore how to support safe, stigma-free discussions about cannabis use and prevention.

"As a community, we have a responsibility to listen to the voices of our youth and families—not just to respond, but to truly understand," **said Kim Livingston, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of the Bellport Area.** "When it comes to cannabis education, their lived experiences and perspectives are essential in shaping messaging that is relevant, honest, and empowering. This Listen and Learn Series creates a space where dialogue leads to connection—and where education is built not for them, but with them."

"Destigmatization is the process of undoing a bias so deeply rooted that it has shaped the very narrative of our nation. By hosting these events, we help prevent those barriers from taking hold in the first place. At B.L.O.O.M. ROC, we believe that true economic development in the cannabis space requires intentional investment in both youth and the trusted adults who guide them. To unlock the full potential of our communities, we must begin with informed, stigma-free education." **Chad Anderson, Vice President of B.L.O.O.M. ROC**

The Office plans to use the sessions to produce culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate, youth-driven resources that meet youth and their trusted adults "where they're at" with the information they need most—answering the call from communities across the state for clearer, more accessible cannabis education. For more information and educational resources about cannabis, visit the OCM's Cannabis Education Library at cannabis.ny.gov/education.

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