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TRAILBLAZERS

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WILLIAM CARUSO

ARCHER & GREINER



PIONEER SPIRIT When William Caruso began advocating for legalizing medicinal uses of marijuana, he encountered broad skepticism. “There was a lot of debate. Was medical cannabis a real thing? Or was it a bunch of potheads looking to get high?” Years later, legislators and policymakers are rapidly nearing consensus around authorizing medical marijuana and legalizing — or at least decriminalizing — all forms of cannabis. Caruso, a lawyer and lobbyist who formed the advocacy group New Jersey United for Marijuana Reform, sees legalization as not just an economic issue, but one of racial and social justice. “There are larger issues here related to race, culture and socioeconomic status,” such as what to do about all the people with criminal records for selling a product that may soon become legal.

TRAILS BLAZED Caruso, who describes himself as a somewhat boring “policy guy,” became interested in cannabis issues while working as an aide to then-U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews of New Jersey. One day, a New Jersey man and his wife, who had multiple sclerosis, showed up at Andrews’ Capitol office to seek the congressman’s support for medical marijuana legislation. Andrews had opposed relaxing marijuana laws, but when the meeting ended, “everybody was in tears. For me, it was a profound moment, the emergence of this thing that had been taboo for so long.” After joining Archer & Greiner, Caruso began his advocacy in earnest.

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS Caruso thinks a homegrown cannabis industry would boost New Jersey’s economy while also mitigating historic inequities in the criminal justice system, especially if old marijuana-related convictions are expunged. But he thinks the state should move quickly, before Congress imposes federal regulations that favor big players in the industry over local interests. “This is inevitable now. It’s just a question of how quickly Jersey gets there.”