

**RCW 69.50.335 Cannabis retailer, processor, producer licenses—
Issue, reissue of licenses—Social equity applicants—Rules—**

Definitions. (1) (a) Beginning December 1, 2020, and until July 1, 2032, cannabis retailer licenses, cannabis processor licenses, and cannabis producer licenses that have been subject to forfeiture, revocation, or cancellation by the board, or cannabis retailer licenses that were not previously issued by the board but could have been issued without exceeding the limit on the statewide number of cannabis retailer licenses established before January 1, 2020, by the board, may be issued or reissued to an applicant who meets the cannabis retailer license, cannabis processor license, or cannabis producer license requirements of this chapter.

(b) In accordance with (a) of this subsection, the board may issue or reissue:

(i) Up to 100 cannabis processor licenses immediately; and

(ii) Beginning January 1, 2025, up to 10 cannabis producer licenses, which must be issued in conjunction with a cannabis processor license.

(c) In addition to the cannabis retailer licenses and cannabis producer licenses that may be issued under (a) and (b) of this subsection, beginning January 1, 2023, and continuing every three years until July 1, 2032, the board may, with the approval of the legislature through the passage of a bill, increase the number of cannabis retailer licenses and cannabis producer licenses for the social equity program based on:

(i) The most recent census data available as of January 1, 2023; and

(ii) The annual population estimates published by the office of financial management.

(d) In addition to the cannabis retailer licenses that may be issued under (a) of this subsection, beginning January 1, 2024, and until July 1, 2032, the board may issue up to 52 cannabis retailer licenses for the social equity program.

(e) (i) At the time of licensure, all licenses issued under the social equity program under this section may be located in any city, town, or county in the state that allows cannabis retail, cannabis production, or cannabis processing business activities, as applicable, at the proposed location, regardless of:

(A) Whether a cannabis retailer license, cannabis producer license, or cannabis processor license was originally allocated to or issued in another city, town, or county; and

(B) The maximum number of retail cannabis licenses established by the board for each county under RCW 69.50.345.

(ii) The board must adopt rules establishing a threshold of the number of licenses created by this section that can be located in each county.

(f) After a social equity license has been issued under this section for a specific location, the location of the licensed business may not be moved to a city, town, or county different from the city, town, or county for which it was initially licensed.

(2) (a) In order to be considered for a cannabis retailer license, cannabis processor license, or cannabis producer license under subsection (1) of this section, an applicant must be a social equity applicant and submit required cannabis license materials to the board. If the application proposes ownership by more than one person, then at

least 51 percent of the proposed ownership structure must reflect the qualifications of a social equity applicant.

(b) Persons holding an existing cannabis retailer license or title certificate for a cannabis retailer business in a local jurisdiction subject to a ban or moratorium on cannabis retail businesses may apply for a license under this section.

(3)(a) In determining the priority for issuance of a license among applicants, the board must select a third-party contractor to identify and score social equity applicants, using a scoring rubric developed by the board. The board must rely on the score provided by the third-party contractor in issuing licenses.

(b) The board may deny any application submitted under this subsection if:

(i) The board determines that, upon the advice of the third-party contractor, the application does not meet the social equity licensing requirements of this chapter; or

(ii) The board determines the application does not otherwise meet licensing requirements.

(4) The board must adopt rules to implement this section. Prior to adopting any rule implementing this section, the board must consider advice on the social equity program from individuals the program is intended to benefit. Rules may also require that licenses awarded under this section only be transferred to or assumed by individuals or groups of individuals who comply with the requirements for initial licensure as a social equity applicant for a period of at least five years from the date of initial licensure.

(5) The annual fee for issuance, reissuance, or renewal for any license under this section must be waived through July 1, 2032.

(6) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Disproportionately impacted area" means a census tract or comparable geographic area within Washington state where community members were more likely to be impacted by the war on drugs. These areas must be determined in rule by the board, in consultation with the office of equity, using a standardized statistical equation to identify areas with demographic indicators consistent with populations most impacted by the war on drugs. These areas must be assessed to account for demographic changes in the composition of the population over time. Disproportionately impacted areas must include census tracts or comparable geographic areas in the top 15th percentile in at least two of the following demographic indicators of populations most impacted by the war on drugs:

(i) The area has a high rate of people living under the federal poverty level;

(ii) The area has a high rate of people who did not graduate from high school;

(iii) The area has a high rate of unemployment; or

(iv) The area has a high rate of people receiving public assistance.

(b) "Social equity applicant" means an applicant who has at least 51 percent ownership and control by one or more individuals who meet at least two of the following qualifications:

(i) Lived in a disproportionately impacted area in Washington state for a minimum of five years between 1980 and 2010;

(ii) Has been arrested or convicted of a cannabis offense or has a family member who has been arrested or convicted of a cannabis offense;

(iii) Had a household income in the year prior to submitting an application under this section that was less than the median household income within the state of Washington as calculated by the United States census bureau; or

(iv) Is both a socially and economically disadvantaged individual as defined by the office of minority and women's business enterprises under chapter 39.19 RCW.

(c) "Social equity goals" means:

(i) Increasing the number of cannabis retailer, producer, and processor licenses held by social equity applicants from disproportionately impacted areas; and

(ii) Reducing accumulated harm suffered by individuals, families, and local areas subject to severe impacts from the historical application and enforcement of cannabis prohibition laws.

(7) Except for the process detailed in subsection (1) of this section, the process for creating new cannabis retail licenses under this chapter remains unaltered. [2023 c 220 s 3; 2022 c 16 s 60; 2021 c 169 s 2; 2020 c 236 s 2.]

Intent—Finding—2022 c 16: See note following RCW 69.50.101.

Findings—Intent—2025 c 58; 2020 c 236: "(1) The legislature finds that additional efforts are necessary to reduce barriers to entry to the cannabis industry for individuals and communities most adversely impacted by the enforcement of cannabis-related laws. In the interest of establishing a cannabis industry that is equitable and accessible to those most adversely impacted by the enforcement of drug-related laws, including cannabis-related laws, the legislature finds a social equity program should be created.

(2) The legislature finds that individuals who have been arrested or incarcerated due to drug laws, and those who have resided in areas of high poverty, suffer long-lasting adverse consequences, including impacts to employment, business ownership, housing, health, and long-term financial well-being. The legislature also finds that family members, especially children, and communities of those who have been arrested or incarcerated due to drug laws, suffer from emotional, psychological, and financial harms as a result of such arrests and incarceration. The legislature further finds that individuals in disproportionately impacted areas suffered the harms of enforcement of cannabis-related laws. Those communities face greater difficulties accessing traditional banking systems and capital for establishing businesses.

(3) The legislature therefore finds that in the interest of remedying harms resulting from the enforcement of cannabis-related laws in disproportionately impacted areas, creating a social equity program will further an equitable cannabis industry by promoting business ownership among individuals who have resided in areas of high poverty and high enforcement of cannabis-related laws. The social equity program should offer, among other things, financial and technical assistance and license application benefits to individuals most directly and adversely impacted by the enforcement of cannabis-related laws who are interested in starting cannabis business enterprises. It is the intent of the legislature that implementation of the social equity program authorized by this act not result in an increase in the number of cannabis retailer licenses above the limit on the number of cannabis retailer licenses in the state established

by the Washington state liquor and cannabis board before January 1, 2020." [2025 c 58 s 4007; 2020 c 236 s 1.]