Statement from Jose Chapa, Senior Policy Associate, Immigrant Defense Project
on New York’s Effort to Legalize Recreational Marijuana in 2021

Today, New York Governor Cuomo renewed the call for the state to legalize recreational marijuana. New York has a special opportunity to pass the most inclusive, progressive marijuana legalization in the country to address the injustices and inequalities laid bare by decades of harms due to the War on Drugs compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Any progressive marijuana legalization bill must prioritize the concerns of immigrant and Black and brown communities and reinvest in the communities most harmed by criminalization.

The newly elected Democratic supermajority in the state legislature should work hand in hand with the Governor’s office to make sure that New York’s marijuana legalization program comprehensively addresses the damage that has been done by years of prohibition. It must address the needs of immigrant New Yorkers who have faced deportation and have been deemed ineligible for status over the years as a result of New York’s marijuana prohibition and invest in immigrant communities of color.

IDP stands with the Start SMART NY Coalition which has been fighting for legalization. Our Coalition will continue to advocate for a legalization framework that includes provisions to reinvest tax revenues into communities harmed by cannabis criminalization and addresses the devastating consequences of past marijuana convictions on immigrants. IDP will continue to advocate for a bill rooted in marijuana justice in New York this session.