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My name is Dasheeda Dawson and I am the new City of Portland Cannabis Program Supervisor. As only the third Black woman in the country to hold a cannabis regulatory oversight leadership role, I'm thrilled to be joining the Office of Community & Civic Life team to serve the City and its thriving cannabis community.

AN INTRODUCTION: FROM ADVERSITY TO ACTIVISM

Originally from pre-gentrified Brooklyn, my life's path has been paved with adversity, largely because of our society's entrenched inequities. With the support of a diverse community and initiatives like [Prep for Prep](#), a leadership development program that offers promising students of color access to an elite prep school education in New York City, I was able to transform adversity into advantage. I gained access to the highest levels of education and took full advantage of my opportunities, attending Princeton University for my undergraduate degree. Therefore, it wasn't lost on me the significance of Nicholas Johnson, Class of 2020, [making history as Princeton's first Black valedictorian](#) in its 274 years of existence. Even with my privilege, as a Black woman, I understand that because of systemic racism, there is little to protect me from becoming a hashtag like Breonna Taylor, who was [fatally shot by law enforcement](#) while sleeping in her own bed.

For many, this is an awakening to the inequalities that Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color face daily. Millions of people across the world watched the police show brutal disregard for George Floyd's life. His murder became an alarm clock ringing for long overdue change and action. Many of us have always been fully awake to these disparities, because the skin we have been blessed to live in too often presents the biggest risk to our lives. From police brutality to infant-maternal outcomes, there are very few areas of our society not significantly impacted by pervasive systemic racism that has endured for more than 400 years. Thankfully, change is in motion and I stand in solidarity with those sincerely expressing their outrage, grief and despair for the brutality we have watched unfold.

As I begin my new role with the City, I draw inspiration from the words of the Honorable Charlotte B. Rutherford, a respected Portland activist, attorney and former administrative judge:

“Well, to me, civil rights as far as what Black people need or should have had, or will eventually acquire, is a lot broader than law. There's a lot more to it than what's written on a piece of paper. And activism is not just front line marching. **Activism is taking a role in making things better, whether that's culturally, educationally, politically, or in the streets.**”

Regardless of access and opportunity, the sad reality is that Black people face the specter of constant peril because of racism's omnipresent threat. The war on drugs, predominantly waged against Black and Brown men, has long been a tool of racial oppression. Marijuana possession and sale, whether perceived or real, has provided an excuse for over-policing, state violence, and law enforcement interactions that far too often end in death for people of color. In fact, cannabis prohibition has led to Black Americans being almost [four times as likely to be arrested](#) for possession relative to our white counterparts and remains one of the top reasons for [deadly police interactions](#) in our communities. Understanding the role marijuana prohibition has played in my own life has fueled my global cannabis strategy, education and advocacy work for the past four years. I look forward to actively collaborating with all partners and stakeholders to continue building and elevating both the cannabis community and the City of Portland.

PORTLAND: CREATING EQUITY WITH CANNABIS

[The City of Portland Cannabis Program](#) recognizes the overwhelming damage caused by 80 years of cannabis prohibition and the major restorative potential of legalization. As one of the first cities in the country to establish a social equity grantmaking program tied to cannabis tax revenue, it also recognizes the tremendous opportunity of dismantling a long-standing construct of racism that persists in the United States. Reinvestment of cannabis tax funds is a logical way to begin repairing the harm, restoring communities and creating more pathways to health equity for communities that have been purposely targeted by unjust cannabis laws. Here in Portland, nearly \$1,500,000 has been reinvested to support Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. The Cannabis Social Equity Grant Fund has supported 34 community expungement clinics, over 2000 legal analyses for expungement, and nearly 300 Portlanders have received specialized workforce training and career development assistance free-of-charge.

Under my leadership, this program will work to uphold the core tenets adopted by the Cannabis Policy Oversight Team (CPOT) and included in its [2019 Annual Cannabis Policy Report](#):

- The war on drugs has caused disproportionate harm to Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. Cannabis should be used as a tool to direct capital resources into these same communities for the purpose of restitution and restoration.
- The Bureau is committed to adopting policies, regulations and programs that support equitable access to the cannabis industry, so that communities and individuals that have experienced the greatest harm from prohibition can share in the industry's wealth.
- The City's processes around cannabis regulation and policy development will be informed, acknowledging the long history of trauma and race-based inequities, particularly the multi-generational impact of cannabis criminalization.
- Impacted communities and stakeholders will play a key role in solution-finding, policy and program development, and decision-making.
- Strategic recommendations and execution will require City investments of time and resources.

While we continue innovating a model for equity in the cannabis industry, we must also honor the calls for change that have echoed around the globe. We have witnessed the rise of local mobilization and community leaders sparking national conversations. In our unwavering pursuit of justice, let us continue our unified and deliberate actions to see tangible results, both locally and nationally.