

With Only One Employee, Office of Cannabis Regulation Plans Hiring But Not Vehicle Purchases

Amid staffing shortages, the OCR plans to boost its team but faces challenges in acquiring necessary operational vehicles, highlighting a pressing need for comprehensive resource allocation

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The Office of Cannabis Regulation remains a team of one, with Joanne Moorehead replacing Hannah Carty, who [stepped down as executive director](#) in February.

On Thursday, in her first appearance before the 35th Legislature, Ms. Moorehead told members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance that she intends to grow the staff complement in short order. According to Ms. Moorehead, funding and staffing the office will be “critical to maintaining momentum,” particularly with the recent adoption of rules and regulations and the upcoming rollout of cannabis license applications.?

“We anticipate hiring two enforcement officers per district as a start,” she testified. The OCR has also extended an offer to one individual to fill the role of office administrator. “We hope to have her officially on board in August,” Ms. Moorehead reported. OCR is also working with the Division of Personnel to restructure the responsibilities of a previously advertised part-time position, to then repost it as a full-time job. If all six positions — including the executive director — are filled, OCR anticipates spending \$478,000 on salaries and \$224,660 in benefits.

During discussions about hiring four enforcement officers, lawmakers learned that the Office of Cannabis Regulation (OCR) has already received applications for these positions, which offer an annual starting salary of \$67,000. This salary is higher than that of the V.I. Police Department. Senator Donna Frett-Gregory inquired about the rationale behind this salary decision between OCR and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.

“I am for people making whatever salary they deserve to make,” she clarified, but noted that the large differential between OCR’s enforcement officer salaries and that of similar positions in other agencies “creates an issue for those other agencies.” For example, enforcement officers working for the DLCA receive a starting salary of \$41,000. Frett-Gregory anticipates that the high salaries will effectively allow OCR to poach enforcement officers from other departments. “Everybody moves over to the place that offers the most salary. Sorry...that's not good government,” the budget committee chair declared.?

Wilbur Francis, who leads DLCA’s enforcement division, explained that the high salaries are an attempt to “limit corruption.” According to Mr. Francis, “the willingness to participate in corrupt behavior may be slightly increased if they were compensated at a lower rate.” He asked lawmakers to “bear in mind...that they will be performing some extra duties...which would require a lot more specialization...there will be quite a bit that goes into that.”?

It’s an explanation that raised the ire of Senator Dwayne DeGraff, a career law enforcement officer. “I have to vehemently disagree,” he declared. “Don't make how much you're getting paid attached to corruption.”

Along with plans to hire enforcement officers comes the need to purchase vehicles to facilitate their travel. However, Ms. Moorehead was unable to provide Senator Javan James with a definite timeline for OCR’s acquisition of the necessary vehicles. “I would like to get it as soon as possible...this calendar year,” she offered. A lack of sufficient funds seems to be the proverbial spoke in OCR’s wheel. It’s something that left lawmakers perplexed. “If we're hiring personnel, then we should be procuring the vehicles at the same time. Otherwise, you’re hiring a bunch of people who will be frustrated. They’re not gonna be able to do their job,” Sen. Frett-Gregory bemoaned.

She encouraged Ms. Moorehead to liaise with DLCA to allocate an estimated \$200,000 to purchase four vehicles. “I don't think you have an option if you actually get the Office of Cannabis Regulation off the ground.” Sen. James proposed an alternate solution. “There are plenty of vehicles in government. You [should] just take away some people's vehicle, if you ask me,” he offered.

Outside of the immediate need for vehicles and enforcement officers, Ms. Moorehead indicated that her office needs to fill several specialized positions. At a minimum, she said, the OCR will eventually need “an additional administrative support position, a public safety coordinator, a training specialist, and a full enforcement team comprised of investigators and compliance enforcement officers” to meet the demands of the industry. However, OCR does not anticipate

making hires in those roles before FY2026.

The Office of Cannabis Regulation does not have a formal operating budget for FY2025. Instead, it intends to use the \$1,012,849.64 still available on its balance sheet. Among their growing list of expenditures is \$248,666.66 to be paid to Tyler Technologies for registry software. The same amount must be paid for three years. OCR will also pay \$100,000, \$103,000, and \$106,090 to another vendor over three years. The nature of the contract was not discussed. Another \$2,500 is for membership fees due to the Cannabis Regulators Association.

Perhaps, suggested Sen. Frett-Gregory, “It's time for us to establish an actual budget for the Office of Cannabis Regulation.” Ms. Moorehead has been asked to report planned expenditures for FY2025 to the budget committee. “If we’re gonna get serious about the implementation of cannabis, it's time for us to lay out the budget.” It is anticipated that an appropriated budget would hold OCR over until they “begin to receive the necessary revenues to be self-sustaining.”

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