

40 locations to open throughout the province by July 1, 2018

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rushing legalization despite assertions from Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police that many forces across the province and country will not be prepared by the July 1.

Some of the key concerns outlined by the province's police chiefs are road safety and officer training.

Other concerns levied by members of the opposition, stakeholders and community groups surrounding the plan include availability and pricing, which will have an effect on the black market - reducing which is one of the federal government's stated goals for legalization in the first place.

When the Wynne government announced its plans in early September, it made it clear it would constitute a government monopoly and would sell marijuana only through government-run, LCBO-like pot dispensaries.

The plan involves opening 40 locations throughout the province by July 1, 2018, with an additional 80 in 2019 and an eventual total of 150 by 2020. There will also be an online store, also run by the government.

But will 150 state-run locations over three years and a website be enough to stamp out the black market?

According to a CBC article from Sept. 14, Trina Fraser, a partner with the law firm Brazeau Seller LLP, addressed the House of Commons health committee relating to how to best deal with the marijuana black market.

"If we fail to create an inclusive cannabis industry the black market will thrive and if it thrives cannabis will continue to be easily accessible to minors," she told the committee.

"The stated objectives of the bill include the reduction of the illicit market, and it attempts to do

so by imposing criminal sanctions on those operating outside the legal framework, but this in and of itself will not work. We know this because it hasn't worked. Those who are excluded will continue to operate outside of the law," she added.

Former Toronto police chief Bill Blair, who is now the member of Parliament heading the legalization initiative in Ottawa, made it clear in an article in The Toronto Star at the end of August that eliminating the black market was a top priority.

"In all the conversations I've been involved with - including Quebec - there is an overwhelming consensus that we need to do a better job protecting our communities and our kids," Blair told The Star.

With 444 Ontario municipalities and most government-run dispensaries likely slated for larger centres, it begs the question whether the infrastructure will be able to support

"I have no confidence that the Wynne government will implement a workable, responsible policy. Our Ontario PC caucus doesn't trust them to get it right. The Liberal record is one of gross mismanagement. On almost every issue, first and foremost, they look out for their own political self-interest."

- MPP Ted Arnott

legal demand.

As Blair points out, pricing and taxes will also play a role in how legalization will affect the black market.

Ontario Minister of Finance Charles Sousa seemed to echo that logic while speaking to The Star on Sept. 20.

"It's crucial to have prices in line with neighbouring jurisdictions and to ensure it's not overly ex-

pensive to avoid fuelling illegal sales in the underground economy," Sousa told The Star, while suggesting a possible starting price point of \$10 per gram of marijuana.

However, the government's record on management of tobacco prices in this regard doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

Not including federal taxes, as per government numbers, the provincial

levy per cigarette was 4.45 cents in 2001. That tax rate has nearly quadrupled to 16.475 cents today.

Not surprisingly, according to the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco (NCACT), black market cigarette sales have soared to one in three across the province, and as high as two out of every three in some areas - significantly higher than when the Liberals took office nearly 15 years ago.

A recent committee report to the Minister of Health on Oct. 16 by the Smoke-Free Ontario Modernization report, suggests the government should further and substantially increase smoke taxes in an effort to "discourage smoking."

That seems contrary to the logic being applied by Sousa and the provincial government on the pot file, where maintaining reasonable prices is very much part of the strategy to tackle black market sales.

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