

## Former N.J. cannabis company employee says he was demoted because he's Black

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Be dispensary in Atlantic City was licensed in 2018, but has yet to open.

By [Amanda Hoover](#) | [NJ Advance Media For NJ.com](#)

A former employee of an embattled medical marijuana company has accused the cannabis giant of demoting him because he is Black.

Shelby Brown, a former compliance officer for MPX NJ, filed a lawsuit against iAnthus last week in state Superior Court in Monmouth County. He is an African American disabled veteran.

“Mr. Brown believes that iAnthus’s actions created working conditions so intolerable that he was compelled to resign, as any reasonable person in his position would have

done,” Matthew Sheppe, an attorney with Reiss Sheppe LLP, who is representing Brown, said in a statement.

The lawsuit is the latest in ongoing drama between two companies: MPX, which won the license to grow, process and sell marijuana in the state, and iAnthus, which operates in several states. The two entered into a master services agreement that will over time move ownership from MPX NJ to iAnthus. But state regulators must approve a full transfer of any license.

MPX NJ won the license in 2018 but it has yet to open its doors. There have been [construction delays at its Pleasantville marijuana growing facility](#), and a souring relationship between the two companies has been blamed.

As the business languishes, New Jersey’s 117,000 medical marijuana patients remain stuck in a program with few options. (Just 10 companies currently run 23 open dispensaries, but the state’s Cannabis Regulatory Commission did [award 14 new cannabis business licenses](#) last week.)

MPX made Brown its national compliance director in 2018. He assisted in putting together the application to win one of six coveted licenses in New Jersey’s limited medical marijuana program, according to his lawsuit.

But when iAnthus began taking over MPX’s operations in 2019, it required him to interview for his job. iAnthus did not make other white compliance officers to do the same, Brown alleges.

Brown’s complaint states that iAnthus demoted him to a regional compliance officer and promoted a white man to take over his former role. Budget or personnel requests from Brown went ignored, but such requests submitted by white compliance officers were approved. He was left to do the jobs of several people and duties that fell outside of his job description.

NJ Advance Media previously reported in July on [Brown’s allegations of discrimination](#) at iAnthus. He said he left the role in August.

“I’m a disabled veteran. There was a lot of stress, a lot of exacerbation of my service-related conditions,” Brown said in a phone call. “I had to go, I just couldn’t take it anymore.”

MPX has [claimed iAnthus tried to hijack its operations](#) after investing \$10 million. In a lawsuit late last year, MPX NJ accused iAnthus of attempting to negotiate deals with state and local officials and undertake unauthorized construction at the cultivation facility.

Another former owner and employee of MPX NJ, Julie Winter, has said iAnthus pushed out MPX’s diverse leadership and is misleading state officials about its progress in opening.

Brown said he hopes the lawsuit will shed light on the discrimination at the large cannabis company, and prevent others from facing the same alleged treatment.

“I am a highly experienced, highly educated individual, but the issue is that I’m Black,” he said. “I just need people to see that this is happening in 2021.”

A representative for iAnthus did not immediately return a request for comment, but the company's CEO, Randy Maslow, pushed back against similar allegations in July, calling them "inaccurate, deliberately false and frankly defamatory" in a statement.

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