

House Lawmakers Present Cannabis Legalization Compromise to New Hampshire Senators

New Hampshire Lawmakers Work Towards Cannabis Legalization Compromise

Concord, NH, June 4, 2024 — Seven New Hampshire lawmakers from the Senate and House of Representatives convened in a conference committee on Tuesday to negotiate a deal on marijuana legalization. Both chambers have passed separate versions of legislation to establish a regulated cannabis market, and the committee has until Thursday to finalize a compromise bill to present to Gov. Chris Sununu (R).

House Offers Compromise

During the meeting, House members proposed accepting the Senate-passed version of the bill with four key changes: lowering the proposed state surcharge on cannabis sales, providing licensing priority to existing medical marijuana businesses, adjusting rules around passengers consuming cannabis in vehicles, and immediately decriminalizing up to two ounces of marijuana.

Senate Response Pending

Senate President Jeb Bradley (R) requested a recess to allow senators more time to consider the House's proposal. The conference committee will reconvene on Wednesday afternoon. The committee aims to reconcile significant differences in regulatory structure, criminal justice, licensing, personal possession and THC limits, tax rates, and other issues.

Proposed Changes in Detail

Surcharge Reduction: Lowering the franchise fees on marijuana purchases from 15 percent to 12.5 percent, still applying to both adult-use and medical marijuana.

Licensing Priority: Giving preference to applicants with cannabis industry experience within New Hampshire, followed by those with out-of-state experience.

Passenger Consumption Rules: Prohibiting smoking and vaping marijuana in vehicles but allowing other forms of consumption.

Immediate Decriminalization: Increasing the decriminalization limit from three-quarters of an ounce to two ounces immediately, offsetting the Senate's delay of formal legalization until 2026.

Optimism and Skepticism

Karen O'Keefe, director of state policies for the Marijuana Policy Project, expressed optimism about the negotiations. "Today's committee of conference meeting was encouraging," she told Marijuana Moment. "I'm hopeful conferees will negotiate revisions that can get legalization past the finish line."

Governor's Position

Gov. Chris Sununu has indicated support for the Senate version of the bill but has warned that significant changes by the House could jeopardize its passage. "If the House OK'd the Senate changes, he'd sign the legislation," Sununu told NH Journal.

Historical Context

Voters approved an earlier legalization initiative in 2020, later invalidated by the state Supreme Court. The House passed another version in 2022, but it was rejected by voters. The current effort represents a renewed push for legalization.

Potential Implications

Failure to reach a compromise could delay the reform indefinitely, with Sununu's term ending in January and GOP gubernatorial candidates opposing legalization. Conversely, Democratic candidate Joyce Craig supports legalization, advocating for a system that promotes competition and revenue generation.

Next Steps

All seven conference committee members must agree on a compromise by Thursday to send the bill back to both chambers for votes. The outcome will determine the future of marijuana legalization in New Hampshire.

Marijuana Moment

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New Hampshire lawmakers continue to work extensively on marijuana reform, striving to find a compromise that will enact legalization through a regulated system. The outcome of the current negotiations will significantly impact the state's cannabis policy and the broader movement for legalization in New England.

Background on Legislative Efforts

New Hampshire lawmakers have been actively working on marijuana reform, with previous attempts to pass legislation through a multi-tiered system including state-controlled shops and dual licensing. However, complexities in the legislation led to an impasse. The current negotiations represent a critical effort to reconcile differences and achieve a workable solution for legalization.