

New Hampshire Cannabis Legalization Committee Inches Closer to Deal as Deadline Nears

New Hampshire's Senate and House lawmakers made incremental progress in a conference committee meeting on Wednesday towards legalizing marijuana. Both chambers have passed separate bills to create a regulated cannabis market, and the committee aims to finalize a compromise by Thursday's deadline.

Key Agreements

The committee reached consensus on providing licensing priority to in-state applicants and removing penalties for vehicle passengers consuming cannabis non-smokably. However, disagreements remain on issues like the state surcharge on cannabis sales and decriminalization measures.

Remaining Challenges

The Senate is firm on maintaining a 15% surcharge, while the House proposes reducing it to 12.5%. Additionally, the Senate is hesitant to expand decriminalization measures, citing concerns over public health and safety.

Urgency and Next Steps

Senate President Jeb Bradley expressed reluctance to lower possession thresholds and emphasized his focus on public health. Despite personal opposition to legalization, Bradley indicated potential support for the compromise if it aligns with Senate priorities.

The committee will reconvene Thursday morning to finalize the bill, aiming to present it for an up-or-down vote in both chambers. Governor Chris Sununu has expressed opposition to legalization but acknowledged its inevitability, suggesting he might sign a compromise bill.

If approved, the bill would allow 15 cannabis stores to open statewide by 2026 under a state-run franchise system, with a 15% surcharge on sales. Personal marijuana possession would also be legalized in 2026.

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