

# Massachusetts Senate Passes Bill to Research Psychedelics Therapy for Veterans

The Massachusetts Senate has approved a bill focused on military veterans that includes provisions to create a psychedelics working group to study and make recommendations about the potential therapeutic benefits of substances like psilocybin and MDMA. This comes about a month after the House approved its version of the legislation, based on a proposal initially introduced by Governor Maura Healey (D).

## Legislation Details

On Thursday, the Senate unanimously approved an amended version of a separate House measure in a 38-0 vote. The two chambers must now reconcile their respective bills before the final version potentially goes to the governor's desk.

## The HERO Act

The Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans (HERO Act) is a wide-ranging proposal focused on veterans, but it has cleared both chambers in different forms with the psychedelics policy reform provisions attached. The House version was also amended earlier to include a section that would create a pilot program to examine medical cannabis as an opioid alternative for veterans.

## Psychedelics Working Group

The psychedelics measure wouldn't immediately create a framework for legal access but would require the Executive Office of Veterans' Services (EOVS) to convene a working group to study "alternative therapies for mental health treatments for veterans" and explore "whether psychedelic therapy is associated with improved outcomes among veterans with diagnosed mental health disorders."

## Objectives and Deadlines

The panel would need to "evaluate literature, research trials, and expert opinions to determine if psychedelic therapy is associated with improved outcomes regarding mental health treatment for veterans." It would also be required to issue recommendations "regarding the provision of psychedelic therapy to treat veterans with mental health disorders in Massachusetts." The working group would need to file a report with findings and recommendations with the clerks of the House and Senate and two joint legislative committees no later than January 1, 2025.

## Differences to Reconcile

While the different versions of the HERO Act that have moved through the legislature must be reconciled in a bicameral conference committee, the psychedelics provisions are nearly identical, with minor exceptions

such as specifications on who would serve on the working group.

## **Legislative Support**

“Today we reaffirmed our commitment here in Massachusetts to respect, empower, and support those who have sacrificed for our nation and returned home,” Sen. Adam Gomez (D) said, as reported by WWLP. “By increasing their health care and mental health benefits, promoting businesses to hire veterans, and expanding support services for active veterans and their families, we start to make inroads on issues that have a direct impact on the lives of our service members, benefiting them and their families.”

## **Broader Psychedelics Legislation**

The passage of the HERO Act comes after a Massachusetts joint legislative committee advised the legislature not to pass a broader psychedelics legalization initiative. Activists are currently collecting additional signatures to put the reform before voters on the November ballot.

## **Future Steps**

The campaign first filed two different psychedelics reform initiatives in August, and after the state attorney general determined that they both met the constitutional requirement for ballot placement the following month, activists decided to pursue the version that included a home cultivation option.

Eight cities across Massachusetts have enacted policies to locally deprioritize enforcement of laws against psychedelics, including Salem, Somerville, Cambridge, Easthampton, Northampton, Amherst, Provincetown, and Medford.

## **Related Legislative Actions**

A different Massachusetts legislative committee advanced a bill in February that would legalize psilocybin therapy in the Commonwealth and set up a framework to license facilitators who would supervise medical, therapeutic, and spiritual applications of the drug. Additionally, Rep. Mike Connolly (D) filed a bill in 2021 that received a Joint Judiciary Committee hearing on studying the implications of legalizing entheogenic substances like psilocybin and ayahuasca.

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