

Pennsylvania Lawmakers Introduce Bipartisan Cannabis Legalization Bill Amid Ohio's Market Launch Prep

Bipartisan Pennsylvania lawmakers have announced their intent to file a new bill to legalize recreational marijuana, soliciting support from colleagues amid a revived push for reform in the legislature as neighboring states move forward to open legal cannabis markets.

Background and Motivation

In a cosponsorship memo that was circulated on Monday, Reps. Aaron Kaufer (R) and Emily Kinkead (D) noted that a growing number of states have enacted legalization, including most recently Ohio, which is “primed to open their market with the lion’s share of their licenses perched on the border of Pennsylvania as they seek to take capture Pennsylvania dollars into their market.”

Bill Details

The text of the legislation isn’t available yet, but the lawmakers said it would create a regulated cannabis market under the state Department of Agriculture, prioritize social equity and small businesses, enact safeguards to deter youth use and generate tax revenue for law enforcement and local governments.

Statements from Lawmakers

“We hope this bill will act as a strong starting point for discussions around legalizing adult-use cannabis in a thoughtful and strategic way,” they wrote to colleagues. “Please join us in cosponsoring this important piece of legislation.”

Kaufer said in a press release that the bill that will be introducing “underscores our commitment to responsible regulation of the cannabis industry while addressing the diverse needs of Pennsylvania’s communities.”

Next Steps

Kinkead added that it’s “well past time for the Commonwealth to legalize cannabis for recreational use, address the injustices of the failed War on Drugs, and ensure that Pennsylvanians can benefit from this industry in the same way our neighboring states have.”

“Our bipartisan effort to provide specific language that takes the best practices from other states is the next substantial step in finally getting this done,” she said.

The memo is being distributed a week after several legislators participated in a cannabis rally at the Pennsylvania State Capitol, where there was a significant emphasis on the need to incorporate social equity provisions as they move to advance legalization.

While the rally only featured Democratic lawmakers, Responsible PA organized a separate event last month where Sens. Dan Laughlin (R), who is sponsoring a separate cannabis bill with Sen. Sharif Street (D), said the state is “getting close” to legalizing marijuana, but the job will only get done if House and Senate leaders sit down with the governor and “work it out.”

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