

Key Cannabis Legislation Stalls in Marathon Statehouse Session

In a legislative session that extended for 12 hours on Wednesday, Ohio lawmakers concluded their last meeting before the summer break without advancing the adult-use marijuana policy that has been in development for months. This marks another unsuccessful attempt to address the policy since Issue 2 was passed by voters in November.

Disappointment in the Senate

Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) expressed his disappointment over the lack of progress. “We did have three of our senators working in earnest and we were pretty close to a deal,” Huffman stated. “But we were informed [on Tuesday] it wasn’t going to move.” The session revealed divergent opinions among lawmakers, complicating the passage of any unified policy.

Challenges in the House

Speaker of the Ohio House Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) highlighted the difficulty of crafting legislation that balances various interests. “It’s one of those issues where a change that gains support from one group can simultaneously lose support from another,” Stephens explained. Despite this, efforts were made to advance some form of marijuana policy as an amendment to another bill, which was ultimately voted down.

Efforts to Clarify Voter-Passed Issue 2

Lawmakers remain committed to refining the law that voters approved, focusing on filling gaps not addressed by Issue 2. Stephens indicated that there is still an opportunity to address these issues. However, the Senate adjourned before the House could consider their amendment on adult-use marijuana, ensuring any further action will be delayed until after the summer.

Complexity and Timing Issues

Huffman remarked on the complexity of the issue, stressing that it involves substantial financial considerations and cannot be resolved in a last-minute session. “This is a very complex issue; it involves a lot of money. I don’t think you can wait until the day before the last session and say, ‘let’s try to solve this problem,’” Huffman said.

Minority Leaders’ Perspectives

Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) emphasized the need for additional regulations and expungement provisions. She noted that while the ballot initiative reflects the voters’ will, it did not cover every necessary detail. Ohio House Minority Leader Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) echoed this

sentiment, pointing out the increasing difficulty of making changes as implementation and licensure processes begin.

Bipartisan Agreement on Delta 8 Regulation

Despite the challenges with adult-use cannabis, lawmakers found common ground on the regulation of Delta 8 THC products. Governor Mike DeWine has been advocating for regulations and age restrictions on these products. Stephens indicated that discussions on this topic will continue over the summer, potentially leading to separate legislation.

While the urgency to finalize marijuana legislation is apparent, the Ohio legislature's recent session highlights the complexities and differing opinions that make progress challenging. Lawmakers will need to reconvene after the summer to address the unresolved aspects of adult-use marijuana policy, guided by the voters' decision on Issue 2 and the practicalities of effective regulation.

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