

Texas Activists Submit Signatures for Bastrop Cannabis Vote

Activists in Bastrop Push for Cannabis Decriminalization Initiative

Bastrop, Texas – July 2024 – Activists in Bastrop have submitted what they believe to be enough signatures to place a marijuana decriminalization initiative on the local ballot this November. Ground Game Texas, a political action committee, announced on Monday that they turned in more than 600 signatures, surpassing the approximately 400 required for validation.

Empowering Local Democracy

The campaign, spearheaded by Desiree Venable, a Democratic candidate for the Texas House of Representatives, highlights the role of community action in legislative change. Venable emphasized the importance of grassroots efforts in shaping policies that reflect the community's values.

“This cannabis reform petition is an example of true democracy and the power we have as community members to implement legislation that directly affects our wants and needs,” Venable stated in a press release. She argued that criminalizing marijuana curtails personal freedoms and hampers opportunities for career advancement and higher education.

Racial Justice and Resource Allocation

Catina Voellinger, Executive Director of Ground Game Texas, added that the “Bastrop Freedom Act” aims to advance racial justice and prevent the misuse of public resources. This initiative is part of a broader movement in Texas, where activists are pushing for similar reforms across various cities.

A Broader Movement Across Texas

In recent weeks, activists in Dallas also submitted nearly 50,000 signatures to put a decriminalization measure on their local ballot. Multiple cities in Texas, including Austin and San Marcos, have already enacted local decriminalization policies, though the journey has not been without challenges.

A recent legal victory for advocates came when a Texas district court judge dismissed a lawsuit from the Republican state attorney general aimed at overturning Austin's voter-approved marijuana decriminalization initiative. This ruling maintains the validity of the 2022 reform measure, pending any appeals.

Legal and Political Opposition

However, the path to decriminalization has faced significant opposition. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has filed lawsuits against several cities, including Austin, San Marcos, and Killeen, attempting to overturn local decriminalization efforts. Paxton has criticized these measures as promoting “anarchy” and

undermining state law.

Governor Greg Abbott has also voiced his disapproval, asserting that local governments lack the authority to contravene state legislation. Abbott argued that allowing cities to set their own cannabis policies would lead to legal chaos and inconsistency.

Impact of Decriminalization Measures

Despite the opposition, decriminalization measures in cities like Austin, Denton, and San Marcos have had tangible impacts. These policies generally prevent police from arresting or citing individuals for low-level cannabis possession, except in cases involving more serious crimes. This has kept many people out of jail and redirected law enforcement resources to higher-priority issues.

However, the implementation of these policies has faced resistance from some local governments. For instance, after Harker Heights voters approved a decriminalization measure, the city council initially overturned the ordinance, citing conflicts with state law. Activists responded by collecting signatures for a new initiative, successfully reinstating the decriminalization measure despite ongoing resistance from city officials.

State-Level Legislative Efforts

At the state level, there have been attempts to advance cannabis reform. The Texas House of Representatives passed several bills last year to decriminalize marijuana, expunge records, and allow medical cannabis for chronic pain patients. However, these efforts stalled in the Senate, reflecting the broader legislative challenges facing cannabis reform in Texas.

Public Opinion and Future Prospects

Public support for marijuana reform in Texas remains strong. Recent polls indicate that a significant majority of Texans, including a notable portion of Republicans, favor legalizing or decriminalizing marijuana. This growing public support may influence future legislative efforts and ballot initiatives.

As activists in Bastrop await the validation of their signatures, their campaign represents a continued push for local control over cannabis policy. Whether these efforts will lead to lasting change depends on the ongoing legal and political battles, as well as the evolving public sentiment toward marijuana reform in Texas.

The initiative in Bastrop reflects a broader movement across Texas cities, demonstrating the power of local activism in shaping public policy. As the debate over marijuana decriminalization continues, the efforts of activists and the responses from state officials will play a critical role in determining the future of cannabis reform in Texas.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

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