

GOP Lawmakers Press DOJ to Reconsider Cannabis Policy

Republicans Oppose Biden Administration's Cannabis Rescheduling Plan

Republican lawmakers in Congress have voiced strong opposition to the Biden administration's plan to reclassify marijuana under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). Led by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) and Sen. James Lankford (R-OK), 23 other House and Senate GOP members signed a public comment letter addressed to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland at the Department of Justice (DOJ). The letter claims the recommendation to move cannabis to Schedule III was politically motivated rather than based on scientific evidence.

Allegations of Political Motivation

"The decision to disregard public safety and medical concerns to reclassify marijuana is strictly political," Sessions stated in a press release. "This egregious proposed rule fails to provide sufficient science and data in support. Senator Lankford and I are leading the charge in raising the alarm from Congress."

The letter argues that the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) analysis should not consider the fact that 38 states and Washington, D.C. have legalized medical cannabis. It accuses HHS and DOJ of choosing a desired conclusion and working backwards, asserting that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was not properly consulted.

Concerns About DEA's Stance

The letter highlights rumors that the DEA is not on board with the rescheduling plan. "DEA Administrator [Ann] Milgram did not sign the rule, and it states many times that DEA believes additional information is needed regarding the appropriate schedule for marijuana," the letter says. It references DEA's findings from 2016, when it rejected petitions to remove marijuana from Schedule I, suggesting the DEA still supports these findings.

Public Safety and Medical Use Debate

Despite the widespread acceptance of medical marijuana, the GOP lawmakers maintain that cannabis lacks currently accepted medical use. "The fact that states have labeled marijuana as 'medicine' does not change the nature of the drug," the letter states. It also criticizes the proposal for ignoring the dangers of high-potency marijuana, which it claims poses risks such as youth overdoses, schizophrenia, and psychosis.

Support from Prohibitionist Groups

Kevin Sabet, president of Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM), expressed gratitude for Sessions and Lankford's leadership. "The recent HHS decision flies in the face of scientific evidence and is a gift to Big Marijuana," Sabet said. He criticized the rescheduling move as undermining public health and safety to gain political advantage.

SAM has consistently challenged the science behind the finding that marijuana has accepted medical use and is considering all legal options to oppose the rescheduling.

Public Comment and Legislative Actions

The proposed rule to reschedule marijuana was officially posted in May, initiating a public comment period ending on July 22. Advocates and stakeholders are expected to present competing perspectives, with some supporting reclassification and others calling for complete descheduling. Prohibitionists like SAM are expected to oppose the change through lobbying and potential litigation.

Some Republican lawmakers have already taken steps to block or delay the rescheduling. A GOP-led House committee recently passed a funding bill to prevent the DOJ from using its funds for rescheduling or descheduling cannabis. Additionally, the House Appropriations Committee has requested the Biden administration to explain its decision-making process and has expressed concerns about cannabis-impaired driving and the market for intoxicating hemp-based cannabinoids.

Future of Cannabis Rescheduling

As the debate over [cannabis rescheduling](#) intensifies, it remains to be seen how the Biden administration and Congress will navigate the conflicting viewpoints. The outcome will significantly impact the future of cannabis regulation and its perception at the federal level.

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