

Cannabis Decriminalization Measure Advances to Dallas Ballot

Marijuana Decriminalization to Appear on Dallas Ballot Following Signature Certification

In a significant development for cannabis reform, officials in Dallas, Texas, have certified that advocates collected enough signatures to qualify a marijuana decriminalization measure for the local ballot in November. This decision could lead to substantial changes in how cannabis possession is handled in the third-largest city in Texas.

Signature Certification

On Friday, the city secretary confirmed that the advocacy organization Ground Game Texas submitted nearly 50,000 valid petitions for the cannabis reform measure. This certification comes approximately a month after activists turned in the signatures, showcasing strong community support for the initiative.

Potential Impact of the Initiative

If voters approve the initiative, possession of up to four ounces of marijuana would be decriminalized in Dallas. This measure would prevent police from making arrests or issuing citations for Class A or B misdemeanor cannabis possession offenses unless part of a high-priority felony investigation for narcotics or violent crime. Additionally, the measure stipulates that “Dallas police shall not consider the odor of marijuana or hemp to constitute probable cause for any search or seizure.”

Community and Advocacy Response

Catina Voellinger, executive director of Ground Game Texas, expressed her optimism, stating, “The overwhelming support of the ballot petition by Dallas voters is evidence that listening to the community and organizing around issues that matter to them is key to building voter enthusiasm and turnout.” Voellinger credited the success to the dedication and expertise of their field staff, who not only collected tens of thousands of signatures but ensured their accuracy and verifiability.

City Council’s Role

Some members of the Dallas City Council had previously shown interest in streamlining the process through legislative action. However, plans to introduce the proposal at a council hearing last month did not materialize, leaving the matter to voters. The council will now need to formally place the initiative on the ballot, a step expected to occur on August 14.

Councilmember Chad West emphasized the council’s lack of discretion in this matter, stating, “Legally, Council has no discretion on these matters—we must vote to add the amendments to the Charter package that voters in November will vote on. It will be up to the voters to determine whether or not to support the initiatives.”

Broader Implications and Regional Efforts

The study accompanying the initiative highlighted that individuals with diabetes who also engage in other substance use, such as tobacco, binge drinking, and misuse of opioids and stimulants, are more likely to use cannabis. This polysubstance use could exacerbate health risks associated with diabetes, emphasizing the importance of addressing multiple substance use issues in this population.

Other Regional Efforts

This move in Dallas follows similar efforts in other Texas cities. Earlier this month, activists in Bastrop, Texas, turned in what they believe to be enough signatures to put another marijuana decriminalization initiative on the local November ballot. Voters in multiple Texas cities have enacted local decriminalization policies, although the movement has faced ups and downs.

For instance, a Texas district court judge recently dismissed a lawsuit from the Republican state attorney general who sought to overturn a local voter-approved marijuana decriminalization initiative in Austin. This decision means the cannabis reform measure approved by voters in 2022 remains effective, pending any potential appeal.

Opposition and Legal Challenges

Despite growing support for decriminalization, there has been significant opposition. Gov. Greg Abbott has criticized municipal cannabis reform efforts, stating that local communities do not have the authority to override state law. He argued that this would lead to “chaos” and create an “unworkable system.”

Attorney General Ken Paxton has also been vocal against these reforms, using inflammatory rhetoric and filing lawsuits against several cities over their local decriminalization laws.

The certification of enough signatures to place the marijuana decriminalization measure on the Dallas ballot represents a crucial step forward in cannabis reform for the city. With strong community support and the upcoming vote, Dallas could see significant changes in how cannabis possession is managed. As the November vote approaches, both advocates and opponents of the measure will be watching closely to see the outcome and its implications for the future of cannabis laws in Texas.

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