

NH Law Expands Medical Cannabis Use to Any Doctor-Approved Need

New Hampshire Expands Medical Cannabis Access

In a landmark move, New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu has signed a significant medical marijuana expansion bill into law. This new legislation, known as HB 1278, enables doctors to recommend cannabis for any debilitating condition they believe it would improve. Previously, only patients diagnosed with specific conditions could qualify for legal marijuana access.

Expansion of Medical Cannabis Access

The passage of HB 1278 represents a major shift in New Hampshire's approach to medical marijuana. Under the new law, doctors now have the authority to recommend cannabis for any debilitating or terminal medical condition if they believe the benefits outweigh the risks. This expansion opens up new therapeutic opportunities for patients across the state.

The Role of Rep. Wendy Thomas

Rep. Wendy Thomas (D), the sponsor of HB 1278, has been a vocal advocate for the expansion. As a cancer survivor and medical marijuana patient, Thomas has firsthand experience with the therapeutic benefits of cannabis. At a committee hearing earlier this year, she shared how cannabis has helped her manage chronic pain, insomnia, eating issues, gastrointestinal issues, PTSD, and anxiety. Her personal testimony highlighted conditions that were previously not covered by the program.

Thomas's Vision for the Bill

Thomas emphasized that the new law allows for greater flexibility in patient care. "The point of this is that they would be allowed to refer a patient to the program for any condition that they think would fit and benefit the patient," she explained. This change is designed to empower clinicians, especially those who are well-versed in cannabis therapy, to better serve their patients.

Implications for Medical Professionals

The enactment of HB 1278 creates two paths for health providers. For those less familiar with cannabis, the existing list of qualifying conditions remains a useful guide. However, providers with more cannabis literacy can now recommend the program for any health condition they believe could benefit from cannabis treatment. This dual-path system is expected to streamline the process and make medical marijuana more accessible to a broader range of patients.

Potential Conditions for Cannabis Therapy

Rep. Thomas mentioned several conditions that could be effectively managed with cannabis but were not previously listed as qualifying conditions. These include severe menstrual cramps, symptoms of long COVID, pre-dentist anxiety, and post-surgical pain control. By broadening the scope, the new law ensures that more patients can find relief through medical marijuana.

Support from the Medical Cannabis Community

Matt Simon, director of public and government relations at GraniteLeaf Cannabis, welcomed the new law. He noted that many New Hampshire residents use cannabis for medical reasons without realizing they could qualify for the program. Simon believes the expansion will help more patients register and access legal protections and safe, regulated cannabis products.

Continuing Efforts in Cannabis Legislation

The signing of HB 1278 follows two other medical marijuana expansion bills recently enacted by Gov. Sununu. One of these bills adds generalized anxiety disorder as a qualifying condition, while the other allows more healthcare providers to certify patients for the medical marijuana program. These changes are part of a broader effort to make medical marijuana more accessible to New Hampshire residents.

Challenges and Future Prospects

Despite the progress, challenges remain. Last month, Gov. Sununu vetoed a bill that would have allowed medical marijuana businesses to open second cultivation locations, including greenhouses. Sununu cited concerns over safety, security, and location requirements in his veto statement. This decision highlights the ongoing debates and regulatory hurdles in the state's medical marijuana landscape.

Public Opinion and Legislative Efforts

Public opinion in New Hampshire strongly supports marijuana legalization. A recent poll showed that 61 percent of residents favor a bill to legalize marijuana for adults, with 65 percent supporting legalization generally. Despite this, efforts to pass broader legalization measures have faced significant obstacles in the state legislature.

Legislative Setbacks

Earlier this year, House Democrats tabled a legalization measure, effectively killing it. The proposed plan to legalize through a state-controlled franchise model faced criticism and sparked accusations of political maneuvering. The opposition to this model, and the broader debate over marijuana reform, reflects the complexities and divisions within the state's political landscape.

Impact of Upcoming Elections

The future of marijuana reform in New Hampshire may hinge on the upcoming gubernatorial election. Gov. Sununu has announced he will not seek re-election, and the stance of his successor could significantly impact future legislative efforts. Two top Republican contenders, former U.S. Rep. Kelly Ayotte and former state Sen. Chuck Morse, have both expressed opposition to marijuana reform, suggesting that the path forward remains uncertain.

New Hampshire's new medical marijuana expansion law marks a significant step forward in patient care and access. By allowing doctors to recommend cannabis for any debilitating condition, the state has broadened

the scope of its therapeutic cannabis program, offering new hope and relief to many residents. However, the ongoing debates and upcoming elections indicate that the journey toward comprehensive marijuana reform is far from over.

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