

PA's New Cannabis Bill Follows Neighboring States' Cannabis Wins

Bipartisan Pennsylvania Lawmakers File New Cannabis Legalization Bill

Harrisburg, PA — In a significant step towards cannabis reform, bipartisan Pennsylvania lawmakers have officially filed a bill to legalize recreational marijuana in the Commonwealth. Reps. Aaron Kaufer (R) and Emily Kinkead (D) introduced the legislation on Friday, joined by 15 other cosponsors, following the circulation of a draft memo earlier this year aimed at garnering support.

Regional Dynamics Prompt Push for Reform

The renewed push for legalization comes as neighboring states like Ohio advance their own legal cannabis markets. The sponsors of the bill have pointed out that Pennsylvania risks losing revenue to these states unless it establishes its own regulated cannabis market.

“The regional developments indicate that other states are poised to capture Pennsylvania dollars,” Kaufer and Kinkead noted in their earlier memo.

Key Features of the Proposed Legislation

The proposed bill seeks to create a regulated cannabis market overseen by the state Department of Agriculture. Key features include:

Adult Use and Possession Limits: Adults aged 21 and over would be allowed to buy and possess up to 30 grams of cannabis. Medical marijuana patients would be permitted to grow up to five plants for personal use.

Regulatory Changes: The bill consolidates oversight under the Department of Agriculture, previously split between the Department of Health and the Agriculture Department. It also removes provisions for mandatory charter agreements between social equity licensees and existing operators and includes stricter advertising rules for billboards.

Taxation and Revenue Allocation: The bill proposes an 8% sales tax and a 5% excise tax on adult-use cannabis products. Revenue would be allocated to various funds and agencies, including the Cannabis Business Establishment Fund and local governments.

Social Equity and Criminal Justice Provisions: The bill includes pathways for expungements and commutations for cannabis-related convictions. It also ensures incarcerated individuals with qualifying conditions have access to medical cannabis.

Potential Impact and Legislative Challenges

A report commissioned by activists estimates that Pennsylvania could see up to \$2.8 billion in adult-use marijuana sales in its first year, generating as much as \$720 million in tax revenue and creating up to 45,000 jobs.

Despite the potential benefits, some lawmakers have expressed concerns about the timeline for passing the legislation, given the politically charged environment leading up to the November election. The chair of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus has indicated that passing the bill this year may be challenging.

Federal and State-Level Considerations

The bill also includes provisions to ensure that adults who use cannabis legally in Pennsylvania would not be barred from possessing or purchasing firearms, though this does not affect federal restrictions on marijuana and gun ownership.

Meanwhile, a federal lawsuit filed by Warren County District Attorney Robert Greene seeks to overturn the ban preventing medical marijuana patients from buying and possessing firearms.

Looking Ahead

The introduction of this bill marks a crucial development in Pennsylvania's cannabis reform efforts. Lawmakers are calling for swift action as they prepare to return to Harrisburg in September. With both House and Senate proposals nearing alignment, the focus now shifts to garnering legislative support and addressing any remaining concerns.

For more updates on cannabis legislation, Marijuana Moment continues to track over 1,500 bills related to cannabis, psychedelics, and drug policy. For access to our interactive maps, charts, and hearing calendar, consider supporting us on Patreon.

Ongoing Discussions

As discussions continue, Pennsylvania lawmakers are also evaluating other aspects of cannabis regulation, including the potential for state-run cannabis stores and the broader implications for social equity and criminal justice reform.

In summary, the newly filed marijuana legalization bill represents a significant milestone in Pennsylvania's ongoing cannabis reform efforts, reflecting both the changing regional landscape and the evolving priorities of state lawmakers.

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