

# New Jersey Senate Panel Approves Psilocybin Therapy Bill

## New Jersey Senate Committee Advances Therapeutic Psilocybin Bill, Lawmakers Warming to Psychedelics Proposal

A New Jersey Senate committee has advanced legislation that would establish a therapeutic psilocybin program, marking a significant step forward for the state in embracing psychedelic-assisted therapy. The Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee voted almost unanimously on Monday to move the bill, S.2283, out of committee, despite earlier hesitations from some members.

The bill, which would legalize psilocybin for therapeutic use under strict regulations, has undergone amendments aimed at making the proposal more palatable to cautious lawmakers. One of the bill's initial skeptics, Sen. Douglas J. Steinhardt (R), abstained from the vote but acknowledged that he was rethinking his stance.

### Testimonies from Advocates Sway Lawmakers

At Monday's hearing, several lawmakers were visibly moved by testimonies from advocates. Among the speakers was lawyer Lauren Dayton, a former local elected official from Tenafly, who shared her personal experience with psilocybin in treating her debilitating cluster headaches. Dayton explained that conventional treatments, including powerful medications like morphine, have been ineffective for her.

"None of the traditional medicine works," Dayton told lawmakers. "I've had morphine drips in the ER that do not touch this level of pain. The only thing that I know that works is psilocybin. But if I have or take psilocybin, I could be arrested. I could lose my law license, which I value very much. I could lose an elected position."

Her testimony emphasized the life-changing effects of psilocybin, recounting how a single dose provided her with nearly a year of relief from her otherwise relentless headaches. Her story underscored the potential therapeutic benefits of psilocybin, particularly for individuals who have exhausted all other medical options.

### Bill Gains Traction After Amendments

The psilocybin bill, sponsored by Senate President Nick Scutari (D), has seen steady progress in both chambers of the New Jersey Legislature. Earlier this year, a separate Senate committee approved the legislation, and the Assembly version of the bill, sponsored by Assemblymembers Herb Conaway (D), Clinton Calabrese (D), and Anthony Verrelli (D), has also gained traction.

The recent amendments to S.2283 have reshaped the bill to focus solely on regulated medical use, rather than broader legalization for adult use. This shift has made the proposal more acceptable to lawmakers who were initially hesitant.

“I was on the fence, especially prior to some of the amendments getting into this bill,” said Sen. Michael L. Testa Jr. (R), who ultimately supported the bill. “I really like the changes, and coupled with the testimony that I heard, how it’s going to be really medically based as opposed to just purely wellness-based.”

Committee Chair Sen. Paul A. Sarlo (D) reiterated that the bill is not about recreational use but rather about providing relief to people suffering from conditions where other treatments have failed.

### **Amendments Refine Scope of Bill**

The latest version of the bill includes several key changes. One of the amendments clarifies that healthcare professionals would certify that patients have a qualifying medical condition, rather than referring them directly for psilocybin treatment. Another amendment removed language that would have allowed certain mental health professionals, like psychologists and clinical social workers, to certify patients.

The revised bill also explicitly states that it would not restrict access to any psilocybin-based drugs that may be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the future. This clarification was likely intended to alleviate concerns about potential conflicts between state and federal law.

### **Expert Testimony Highlights Psilocybin’s Potential**

In addition to Dayton’s moving testimony, lawmakers heard from other advocates, including a New York firefighter who developed cluster headaches following the 9/11 attacks and Dr. Hannah McLane, a psychotherapist and researcher. McLane emphasized that psilocybin therapy offers hope for patients suffering from treatment-resistant depression, chronic pain, suicidal ideation, and other conditions.

“On a daily basis, I see people healing from these types of therapies,” said McLane, who has helped train psilocybin facilitators in states like Oregon and Colorado, both of which have established regulated psilocybin programs.

McLane explained that psilocybin therapy is highly structured, with patients receiving psilocybin in a controlled setting and undergoing preparation and integration sessions before and after the experience. This approach is vastly different from simply allowing people to purchase and use psilocybin on their own.

### **Labor Groups Seek Worker Protections**

Representatives from the AFL-CIO and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) also weighed in on the bill, urging lawmakers to include worker protections and require union peace agreements. The AFL-CIO emphasized the need for the psilocybin industry to create livable, middle-class jobs, similar to efforts made in the cannabis industry.

“We have a very niche interest in this bill,” said the AFL-CIO speaker, “and that is to create careers instead of just low-wage jobs, just as we did through the cannabis legislation.”

The UFCW representative added that lawmakers should preserve provisions allowing for home cultivation of psilocybin, warning that removing the home grow option would repeat mistakes made with New Jersey’s cannabis laws, which prohibit personal cultivation.

### **Public Support for Psilocybin Legalization Growing**

Public opinion on psilocybin legalization appears to be shifting in New Jersey. A June poll by Stockton University’s William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy found that 55 percent of New Jersey residents

support legalizing psilocybin for medical use under a doctor's supervision. Just 20 percent were opposed, with 24 percent unsure and 1 percent declining to answer.

### **What's Next for Psilocybin in New Jersey?**

The path forward for New Jersey's psilocybin legislation remains promising but complex. With both Senate and Assembly committees having approved versions of the bill, the next steps will be debates on the floors of both chambers. While some lawmakers remain cautious, the amendments to focus on therapeutic use and the compelling testimonies of advocates have garnered increasing support.

As other states like Oregon and Colorado lead the way in psilocybin therapy, New Jersey could soon join their ranks, offering new hope to patients for whom traditional treatments have failed. However, the debate over how best to regulate and implement such a program is likely to continue as the bill moves closer to becoming law.

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