

Hemp Industry Rejects Ohio Bill to Ban Intoxicating Products

Ohio Hemp Industry Pushes Back Against Proposed Ban on Delta-8 THC Products

In Ohio, workers in the hemp industry are raising their voices against a proposed bill that could severely impact their businesses. Senate Bill 326, introduced by State Senator Steve Huffman, aims to ban intoxicating hemp products, specifically delta-8 THC, which has become increasingly popular in smoke shops and corner stores. This legislation threatens to wipe out a significant portion of the hemp market in Ohio, leaving many small businesses scrambling to protect their livelihoods.

The Growing Popularity of Delta-8 THC

Delta-8 THC is a hemp-derived cannabinoid that has gained traction in the U.S. in recent years. It is similar to delta-9 THC, the psychoactive compound found in marijuana, but is believed to produce less intense effects. As a result, delta-8 THC has become a popular alternative for consumers seeking a milder high or therapeutic benefits without the potency of traditional cannabis products.

Since its emergence, delta-8 THC products have been sold in a variety of forms, including edibles, vapes, tinctures, and more. Because delta-8 is derived from hemp, it exists in a legal gray area, gaining attention from both consumers and lawmakers. While marijuana remains illegal for recreational use in Ohio, the 2018 Farm Bill legalized hemp products containing less than 0.3 percent THC. This distinction allowed delta-8 THC to be marketed as a legal alternative, even though it is intoxicating.

The Backlash Against Senate Bill 326

Opponents of SB 326 argue that banning delta-8 THC products would not solve the underlying issues with the hemp market but would instead drive consumers toward the unregulated black market. At last week's Senate Government Committee meeting, many hemp industry workers spoke out, calling for sensible regulations instead of an outright ban.

Jonathan Miller, general counsel for the U.S. Hemp Roundtable, voiced concerns that such a ban would encourage illicit sales of delta-8 THC products, which would operate outside the bounds of safety regulations and age requirements. Miller emphasized that banning legal, regulated products could create an environment where consumers have no guarantee of product safety or quality, undermining the very protections that the bill was supposed to address.

Economic Impact of the Hemp Industry

The hemp-derived cannabinoid market in Ohio has become an important economic driver. A 2023 report on the U.S. cannabinoid industry showed that Ohio's hemp market generates significant revenue and jobs. According to the report, the state's hemp-derived cannabinoid industry is worth over \$700 million in

revenue, supporting more than 8,000 jobs and contributing over \$40 million in annual sales tax receipts.

JD McCormick, president of the American Healthy Alternatives Association, highlighted the importance of the hemp industry in providing alternative pain management options for Ohioans. Many residents have turned to hemp products like delta-8 THC as a substitute for opioids, which are often prescribed for chronic pain management. Banning these products could not only harm small businesses but also take away a crucial alternative for people seeking relief.

Small Business Owners Speak Out

For many Ohioans, the hemp industry is not just a business—it's their livelihood. Mo Dayem, owner of several smoke shops across the state, expressed concern that SB 326 would jeopardize his business and the jobs of his employees. Dayem emphasized that while the hemp industry is in favor of reasonable regulations, it opposes a blanket ban that could devastate small businesses.

Dayem also called for specific regulations, such as a ban on sales to minors, mandatory product testing, and clear labeling requirements. He acknowledged that some hemp products have raised concerns, especially those that are packaged in a way that might appeal to children.

Doug Strahm, who owns two CBD stores in Ohio, also expressed concerns about the bill's potential to destroy his business. Strahm's stores, Happy Harvest Delaware and Happy Harvest Marion, rely heavily on delta-8 THC products, which make up about 80 percent of their sales. Strahm emphasized that his stores only sell these products to customers over 21, and he noted that the median age of their customer base is around 45 years old.

The Impact on Consumers Seeking Wellness

While many businesses are concerned about the financial implications of the bill, some also point to the impact on consumers who use hemp products for wellness purposes. Jaimee Courtney, who owns a CBD store in Bellefontaine, argued that the ban would harm the older adults who rely on hemp products for health benefits.

For many in Ohio, the hemp market offers a safe, legal alternative to traditional medical treatments, especially for those who may be wary of or unable to use more conventional forms of cannabis.

The Path Forward for Ohio's Hemp Industry

As Ohio lawmakers race to pass legislation before the end of the current General Assembly, the future of the state's hemp industry remains uncertain. If SB 326 is not passed before the legislative session ends, the bill would need to be reintroduced in the next session, beginning in January 2025. With many industry workers and business owners speaking out against the bill, it is clear that any proposed regulation should carefully balance safety concerns with the need for economic growth and consumer choice.

Ultimately, advocates of the hemp industry are calling for clear, sensible regulations that address safety and public health concerns while allowing small businesses to thrive. Whether through age restrictions, testing requirements, or better labeling practices, industry leaders are pushing for rules that protect both consumers and the businesses that serve them.

As the debate continues, one thing is clear: the hemp industry in Ohio is not going down without a fight. Whether or not the legislature listens to the voices of these small business owners remains to be seen. However, it's clear that any legislation will have a lasting impact on both the economy and the health of Ohioans.

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