

Thousands in Kansas Hold Medical Cannabis Cards from Missouri

Kansas Lawmakers Resist Medical Cannabis Legalization as Thousands Cross the Border

As the conversation around medical marijuana legalization continues to unfold, Kansans are increasingly making the trek to neighboring Missouri to access medical cannabis, a trend unlikely to change anytime soon given the Kansas Legislature's resistance to reform. Despite over 70% public support for marijuana legalization in the state, Kansas lawmakers remain hesitant to legalize medical marijuana, leaving many residents with no choice but to travel out of state for treatment.

Kansas Lawmakers Table Medical Cannabis Bill Again

In March of this year, Kansas lawmakers tabled a bill that would have legalized medical marijuana, promising to revisit the issue in the 2025 legislative session. As the start of the session approaches in January 2025, discussions on medical marijuana remain at a standstill. In October, the state's medical marijuana committee voted 5-4 against urging the Legislature to pass a bill, with several lawmakers citing unresolved concerns about the potential effects of legalization.

Senator Mike Thompson, a Shawnee Republican and vocal critic of hastily pushing marijuana legislation, has long cautioned against moving forward without thorough research and consideration. Thompson stated that many committee members still have significant questions about medical marijuana's potential consequences, particularly its impact on the state's public health system.

Kansans Flocking to Missouri for Medical Cannabis

With no medical marijuana program in Kansas, thousands of Kansans are crossing the Missouri border to access cannabis products legally. As of October, nearly 2,200 Kansans had obtained medical marijuana cards in Missouri, according to data obtained through a public records request from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

Missouri's medical marijuana program has grown rapidly since its introduction, with medical and recreational sales in 2024 totaling over \$1.3 billion. A significant portion of the sales, about \$1.1 billion, comes from the state's newly legalized recreational cannabis market, which launched in February 2023.

Missouri taxes cannabis sales at 4% for medical marijuana and 6% for recreational marijuana, with the revenue being funneled into programs for veterans, public defense, and substance use treatment. These funds have had a positive impact on Missouri's economy, making it a key player in the growing cannabis market.

Public Support and Legislative Resistance

Despite the clear demand for medical marijuana and overwhelming public support, Kansas lawmakers remain divided on the issue. A recent poll found that over 70% of Kansans favor legalizing medical marijuana, yet their representatives have been slow to act. Outgoing Representative Dennis “Boog” Highberger, a Lawrence Democrat, emphasized the need for legislators to take action in 2025, warning that failure to do so could push the issue back for another year or longer.

While Kansas lawmakers continue to drag their feet, the situation has led many Kansans to turn to Missouri for their medical cannabis needs, further fueling the growing frustration among those who see the state’s resistance as a missed opportunity.

The Economic Impact of Legalization in Missouri

Missouri’s cannabis industry has already demonstrated significant economic potential. According to Missouri Department of Health data, medical and recreational marijuana sales in 2024 have totaled over \$1.3 billion as of October, generating millions in tax revenue. The state’s veterans’ commission, public defense systems, and health programs have benefitted greatly from the influx of funds, highlighting the potential for economic growth that Kansas is currently passing up.

The Kansas Cannabis Chamber of Commerce, which once pushed for marijuana legalization in the state, has shifted its focus toward hemp legislation due to years of legislative setbacks. Erren Wright, the board president of the Chamber, expressed her frustration with the Kansas Legislature’s inaction, noting that small businesses and local communities are suffering as a result.

Governor Kelly Supports Legalization

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly has been a consistent advocate for medical marijuana legalization. Her office has argued that legalization would improve the state’s economy, provide relief for individuals suffering from chronic pain, and help address public health concerns. Despite her support, the Governor’s position has faced resistance in the Legislature, where some lawmakers continue to express concerns about the potential consequences of legalization.

Grace Hoge, a spokeswoman for Governor Kelly, emphasized that the Governor believes legalizing medical marijuana is a common-sense policy that would benefit Kansans overall.

Looking to the Future: Other States’ Influence

As Kansas lawmakers look toward the 2025 legislative session, some have expressed a desire to see the outcomes of upcoming marijuana ballot measures in neighboring states like Nebraska and Florida. Nebraska voters recently approved a medical marijuana program, further expanding the legal cannabis landscape in the region. While Florida’s attempt to legalize recreational cannabis fell short of the required 60% threshold in the 2024 election, it still garnered significant public support.

Despite neighboring states’ successes, Kansas lawmakers have expressed a reluctance to follow suit. In particular, they have shown hesitancy to approve recreational marijuana programs, which are already in place in Missouri and Colorado.

Kansas’ Border States: Cannabis Legalization on All Four Corners

Kansas is surrounded by states that have either legalized or are in the process of legalizing cannabis. To the west, Colorado has had a legal recreational and medical marijuana program in place for years. To the east, Missouri has both medical and recreational marijuana markets, with Nebraska now joining in with medical

cannabis. Oklahoma also allows out-of-state residents to obtain medical marijuana cards, further adding to the pressure on Kansas to act.

However, Kansas lawmakers remain hesitant. The current debate centers around whether to focus on medical marijuana first, followed by recreational legalization, or to leave the decision to voters.

The Road Ahead for Kansas

While Kansas lawmakers are set to revisit the medical marijuana issue in 2025, the growing number of residents crossing state lines to access cannabis suggests that the pressure to act will only intensify. With Missouri's successful cannabis market continuing to expand and neighboring states following suit, the question remains: How long can Kansas continue to resist change before the demand for legalization becomes too overwhelming to ignore?

For now, Kansans continue to wait for their legislators to take action, but as more people turn to neighboring states for medical marijuana, the pressure on the Kansas Legislature to act grows ever stronger.

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