

# Trump's DEA Pick Opposes Cannabis Rescheduling

## Derek Maltz Appointed as Interim DEA Chief Amid Contentious Cannabis Rescheduling Debate

The Trump administration has selected **Derek Maltz**, a former high-ranking U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) official, to serve as the agency's interim administrator. The decision comes at a critical juncture as the DEA grapples with the federal rescheduling of marijuana—a process that could mark a historic shift in U.S. drug policy.

Maltz's appointment follows the departure of **Anne Milgram**, who previously oversaw the agency during a period of increasing scrutiny and legal challenges regarding cannabis regulation. While former President Donald Trump has signaled support for downgrading marijuana's classification, Maltz's past statements cast doubt on how his leadership might influence the outcome of this contentious process.

### Trump's Unexpected Support for Marijuana Rescheduling

In an unexpected move last September, Trump expressed support for rescheduling marijuana through a post on his **Truth Social** platform. This stance aligned with the Biden administration's efforts to revisit the plant's classification under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). Currently listed as a Schedule 1 drug—alongside heroin and LSD—marijuana's status implies it has no accepted medical use and poses a high potential for abuse.

The Biden administration initiated the review in October 2022, led by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). By May 2024, the U.S. Justice Department proposed a significant shift, recommending marijuana be reclassified as a Schedule 3 drug. Such a move would acknowledge its medical use while reducing restrictions on research and commerce. However, the process remains stalled due to a legal appeal aimed at disqualifying the DEA from overseeing the matter.

### Derek Maltz: A Polarizing Figure in the Rescheduling Debate

With a career spanning nearly three decades at the DEA, **Derek Maltz** is best known for leading the agency's Special Operations Division, where he oversaw operations targeting international drug cartels and terrorism networks. His resume includes notable achievements, such as the capture of Sinaloa cartel leader **Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman**. However, Maltz's views on marijuana rescheduling may complicate the ongoing process.

In May 2024, following the Justice Department's interim proposal to reclassify marijuana, Maltz criticized the decision, describing it as **"politics over public safety."** He voiced concerns about the role of politics in shaping drug policy, arguing that scientific evidence should be the cornerstone of such decisions. "If there's scientific evidence to support this decision, then so be it. But you've got to let the scientists evaluate it,"

Maltz told the Associated Press.

## **Contentious Legal Landscape Surrounding Cannabis Rescheduling**

The marijuana rescheduling debate has brought to light stark divisions between federal agencies and stakeholders. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) concluded in August 2023 that cannabis has a “currently accepted medical use” in the U.S., supporting its reclassification. However, internal disagreements within the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the DEA have hindered progress.

A memo from the DOJ’s Office of Legal Counsel, disclosed in May 2024, revealed that the DEA objected to the rescheduling process. The agency raised concerns about the methodology used by HHS to determine marijuana’s medical utility, signaling a lack of consensus within the federal government.

Adding to the complexity, a January 21 hearing before Chief Administrative Law Judge **John Mulrooney II**, intended to address the rescheduling process, was indefinitely postponed. The delay stemmed from an appeal by cannabis industry stakeholders who accused the DEA of bias. These accusations underscore long-standing tensions between the agency and advocates for marijuana reform.

## **Implications of Maltz’s Leadership on the DEA’s Role**

As interim DEA administrator, Derek Maltz inherits the responsibility of guiding the agency through one of its most significant policy challenges. While his appointment has been praised by some Trump loyalists, including Texas Republican Congressman **Chip Roy**, others question whether his past statements and traditional law enforcement approach align with evolving public attitudes toward cannabis.

The DEA’s historical opposition to marijuana reform contrasts sharply with growing bipartisan support for legalization or rescheduling at the federal level. According to recent polls, a majority of Americans favor some form of marijuana legalization, and 23 states have already enacted laws permitting recreational use. This cultural and political shift puts additional pressure on the DEA to align with contemporary views.

## **What Lies Ahead for Federal Marijuana Policy?**

Despite the setbacks, the marijuana rescheduling process remains a pivotal issue with far-reaching implications for public health, criminal justice, and the cannabis industry. If reclassified to Schedule 3, marijuana would join substances like ketamine and anabolic steroids, significantly reducing barriers to medical research and potentially paving the way for broader federal reforms.

However, Maltz’s leadership introduces uncertainty. His criticism of the rescheduling process, coupled with the DEA’s institutional resistance, may prolong the already contentious debate. Without a clear timeline for resolving the current appeal, the future of federal marijuana policy remains in flux.

## **A Divided Administration at a Crossroads**

The appointment of Derek Maltz reflects the Trump administration’s prioritization of experienced law enforcement professionals in leadership roles. Yet, it also exposes internal contradictions in its approach to drug policy. While Trump’s public support for rescheduling signals a potential shift, Maltz’s skepticism highlights the deep-seated challenges facing federal agencies tasked with implementing reform.

As the cannabis industry and advocates await further developments, all eyes are on the DEA and its interim leader. Whether Maltz will embrace a scientific and evidence-based approach or maintain the agency’s historically cautious stance remains a critical question. One thing is clear: the stakes have never been higher for U.S. drug policy.

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