

New Hampshire House Passes Cannabis Legalization Bill

The legislation would legalize cannabis use and possession for those 21 years and older but omits a marketplace for cultivation and dispensary sales.

New Hampshire House lawmakers have three adult-use cannabis legalization bills on the table, but on Feb. 20, they decided to approve the least permissive option.

The New Hampshire House Votes in Favor of Cannabis Legalization Without Providing a Framework for Cultivation, Sales, or Home Growing

The Granite State's upper chamber approved House Bill 75 on a voice vote Thursday. Sponsored by Rep. Kevin Verville, R-Deerfield, the legislation aims to legalize cannabis for those 21 years and older but does not establish a licensed market for commercial cultivation and dispensary sales. Additionally, the bill does not include language permitting home cultivation.

New Hampshire Remains the Only New England State Without an Adult-Use Cannabis Program as Lawmakers Advance a Limited Legalization Bill

The bill's passage highlights New Hampshire's status as the only state in New England without an adult-use cannabis program. Meanwhile, another bill, H.B. 186, sponsored by Democratic Rep. Jared Sullivan, proposes a regulated and taxed system for cannabis sales. Sullivan also sponsors H.B. 198, which would allow home cultivation but not a commercial marketplace. Both alternative proposals remain in the committee process.

Supporters Argue That Adults Should Have the Same Rights to Cannabis as Alcohol, While Opponents Call for a More Structured Approach to Legalization

Rep. Jodi Newell, D-Cheshire, voiced her support for H.B. 75 during Thursday's floor session.

Virginia Provides an Example of Adult-Use Legalization Without a Commercial Market as New Hampshire Debates Its Own Approach

Despite Roy's assertion, Virginia lawmakers legalized adult-use cannabis in 2021 without establishing a commercial marketplace. Earlier this month, Virginia's Democratic-controlled General Assembly sent Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin legislation intended to create a regulated cannabis market.

New Hampshire's Previous Attempt at Legalization Failed Due to Disagreements Over a State-Run Dispensary Model, Leaving This Year's Efforts in Uncertainty

In New Hampshire, House and Senate lawmakers passed an adult-use legalization bill in 2024 and were on the verge of becoming the 25th state in the nation to legalize cannabis for those 21 years and older. However, the two chambers failed to reconcile their differences over Senate amendments, stalling the effort in a conference committee.

One of the key roadblocks in 2024 involved the Senate's inclusion of a state-run "franchise model" for dispensaries.

Republican Governor Kelly Ayotte's Stance on Cannabis Legalization Could Threaten the Future of H.B. 75 Despite Lawmakers' Efforts

Should the two chambers agree on H.B. 75 this session, the legislation would still face a potential veto from Republican Gov. Kelly Ayotte. Ayotte, who assumed office in January, expressed her opposition to adult-use cannabis legalization during her campaign.

The Future of Cannabis Reform in New Hampshire Remains Uncertain as Lawmakers Continue to Debate the Best Path Forward

With conflicting perspectives among lawmakers and opposition from the governor's office, the future of cannabis reform in New Hampshire remains uncertain. While some legislators push for a broader regulatory framework that includes commercial sales and home cultivation, others remain hesitant to take a more expansive approach. The debate reflects broader national conversations about cannabis legalization, with some states opting for incremental approaches while others implement full-scale regulatory frameworks. As the legislative process continues, advocates and opponents alike will watch closely to see if compromises can be made or if New Hampshire will remain without a functional adult-use cannabis market for the foreseeable future.

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