

Cannabis Legalization Push Faces Governor, Senate Opposition

New Hampshire's Cannabis Legalization Bill Faces Delays as Lawmakers Struggle to Reach Consensus

New Hampshire legislators continue to debate the future of cannabis legalization, with competing proposals facing resistance from both the Senate and Governor Kelly Ayotte. While a Republican-backed bill advocating for minimal regulation has cleared the House, it is unlikely to gain traction in the Senate. Meanwhile, a Democratic-led proposal, House Bill 186 (HB 186), remains under review, leaving the state's cannabis policy in limbo.

House Bill 186 Proposes a Regulated Cannabis Market with Taxation Under Existing Structures

HB 186 aims to establish a legal framework for marijuana sales, incorporating taxation under the existing rooms and meals tax structure. Proponents argue that this approach would generate significant revenue for the state. If sales in New Hampshire were to mirror those in Massachusetts, the estimated annual tax revenue could reach \$27.4 million. Supporters believe this income could be allocated to public services, infrastructure, and substance abuse prevention programs.

Governor Kelly Ayotte's Strong Opposition and Legislative Disagreements Create Roadblocks for Reform

Despite the potential economic benefits, Governor Ayotte has consistently opposed marijuana legalization, creating uncertainty for any cannabis-related legislation. Beyond the governor's stance, lawmakers remain divided on how cannabis should be sold in New Hampshire. Some advocate for state-controlled sales, similar to New Hampshire's approach to liquor distribution, while others push for a private retail model. This ongoing disagreement has historically stalled legalization efforts.

The House Commerce Committee Will Continue Reviewing HB 186 Before a Final Vote in 2026

The House Commerce Committee is expected to deliberate on HB 186 throughout the year, with a final vote anticipated in January 2026. Until then, the debate over cannabis legalization in New Hampshire remains unresolved, leaving residents and businesses uncertain about the future of the state's cannabis policies.

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