

# NC Lawmaker Proposes Cannabis Legalization for Adults 21+

## North Carolina Lawmaker Introduces Adult-Use Cannabis Legalization Bill

North Carolina remains one of the few states yet to legalize medical cannabis, but a new legislative effort seeks to bypass that step entirely by introducing adult-use legalization. On March 17, State Representative Jordan Lopez (D-Mecklenburg) filed House Bill 413, known as the Marijuana Legalization and Reinvestment Act. The bill aims to establish a regulated and taxed cannabis market for adults 21 and older.

### Key Provisions of House Bill 413

Under the proposed legislation, adults would be allowed to:

Possess up to **2 ounces of cannabis, 15 grams of concentrate, or 2,000 milligrams of THC.**

Grow up to **six cannabis plants** in private residences.

Purchase cannabis from licensed dispensaries, which would be subject to a **30% excise tax**—the second highest in the nation after Washington's 37% rate.

Face an additional **2% local tax** at the discretion of municipalities.

A significant portion (25%) of tax revenue would be directed to a newly established **Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund**. This fund would support individuals and communities disproportionately affected by past cannabis prohibition and related policies, such as mass incarceration, systemic racism, and poverty.

### Criminal Justice Reform and Expungement

In addition to legalization, the bill addresses past cannabis-related convictions. If passed, House Bill 413 would:

Provide **automatic expungement** for certain cannabis-related convictions by **July 1, 2028**.

Align with social justice efforts, citing a 2020 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report that found Black Americans are **3.6 times more likely** than white individuals to be arrested for cannabis possession, despite similar usage rates.

### A Challenging Legislative Landscape

While **24 states** have legalized adult-use cannabis, no state has yet skipped medical legalization before enacting full recreational use. Additionally, North Carolina's Republican-controlled General Assembly presents a significant hurdle.

House Speaker **Destin Hall (R-Caldwell)** has previously voiced opposition to any form of cannabis legalization, posing a substantial challenge to the bill's progress. Despite this, Lopez remains committed to the cause, emphasizing widespread public support for reform.

## **Public Opinion and Political Reception**

Recent surveys indicate strong public backing for medical cannabis reform in North Carolina. A **February 2025 Meredith College poll** found that **71% of voters** support medical cannabis legalization. However, the poll did not ask about adult-use legalization, leaving uncertainty about public opinion on the broader reform effort.

## **Funding Equity and Market Oversight**

H.B. 413 also includes provisions for economic equity and market regulation:

**10% of tax revenue** would go to the **Cannabis Enterprise Opportunity Fund**, which would provide **zero-interest loans and grants** to historically impacted applicants and cannabis-related businesses.

The **Department of Public Safety** would oversee the licensing process for cultivation, retail, manufacturing, transportation, testing, delivery, and on-site consumption establishments.

An **Office of Community Reinvestment** would promote diversity and equity in the cannabis marketplace.

Local municipalities would retain the authority to prohibit cannabis establishments within their jurisdictions. However, they could not ban **deliveries or transportation** of cannabis through their areas.

## **Consumer Protection and Legal Restrictions**

The legislation outlines several regulations aimed at consumer safety:

**Public cannabis consumption** remains prohibited.

**Operating a vehicle under the influence** of cannabis would be illegal.

**Child-resistant packaging** would be mandatory.

Marketing restrictions would prohibit any branding or imagery appealing to minors, including **cartoons, toys, and popular characters**.

## **Previous Attempts at Cannabis Reform**

North Carolina has previously attempted to pass medical cannabis legislation, but efforts in **2022 and 2023** failed despite some bipartisan support. In 2023, a medical cannabis bill passed the Senate in a **36-10 supermajority vote** but stalled in the House under former Speaker Tim Moore.

Senate President Pro Tempore **Phil Berger (R-Guilford)** has indicated openness to medical cannabis reform, provided legislation also addresses unregulated THC products derived from hemp. However, as of **March 16, 2025**, no medical cannabis-focused bills have been introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly.

## **Cannabis Access on Tribal Lands**

Although the state has not legalized cannabis, North Carolina adults can still legally purchase cannabis on the **Qualla Boundary**, a 57,000-acre territory in the western part of the state where the **Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians** launched sales in **September 2024**.

Outside of the Qualla Boundary, cannabis possession remains a **misdemeanor offense**, with **felony charges** possible for possession exceeding 1.5 ounces.

## **The Road Ahead**

While H.B. 413 represents a bold step toward cannabis reform in North Carolina, it faces significant legislative and political challenges. Whether the bill gains traction or not, the conversation around cannabis legalization continues to evolve in the state, with growing public interest and shifting national trends playing a key role in future policy decisions.

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