

Cannabis Rescheduling: 43,000 Public Comments to the DEA

Americans Speak Out: 43,000 Comments Flood DEA on Cannabis Rescheduling

In an unprecedented move, Americans from all walks of life have made their voices heard in the ongoing debate over cannabis policy. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) recently concluded a public comment period regarding a proposed rule change that could shift cannabis from Schedule 1 to Schedule 3 of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). The result? A staggering 43,000 comments were submitted, the most ever received by the DEA on any rule change.

Understanding the Proposed Rule Change

Currently, cannabis is classified as a Schedule 1 drug, meaning it is considered to have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. The proposed change would move cannabis to Schedule 3, recognizing some medical value but still maintaining strict regulatory controls due to potential abuse. This shift could significantly impact federal and state cannabis laws, affecting everything from medical research to criminal justice.

The Diversity of Voices in the Public Comments

The 43,000 comments reflect a wide array of perspectives on cannabis policy. Some submissions were brief and to the point, while others were detailed, complete with footnotes and bibliographies. Contributors ranged from everyday citizens to attorneys and policy experts, each offering a unique viewpoint on the potential rescheduling.

One notable aspect of these comments is the overwhelming support for more significant reform. According to an analysis by *Cannabis Business Times*, approximately 69.3% of the comments—nearly 30,000—advocate for descheduling, decriminalizing, or fully legalizing cannabis at the federal level. This overwhelming majority indicates a strong public desire to see cannabis removed from the CSA entirely, rather than merely rescheduled.

The Argument for Descheduling

Many commenters argue that cannabis should never have been included in the CSA in the first place. They point to historical evidence, such as the findings of the Shafer Commission, which in 1972 recommended that cannabis be decriminalized rather than criminalized. The commission's report, "Marihuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding," was largely ignored by the Nixon Administration, leading to the current policy of prohibition.

Critics of the current scheduling argue that the original decision to classify cannabis as a Schedule 1 substance was not based on scientific evidence but on political motivations and racial bias. This perspective

is supported by statements from former Nixon administration officials, who have admitted that the drug war, including the criminalization of cannabis, was partly driven by the desire to suppress certain minority groups and political opponents.

Personal Stories and the Human Impact of Cannabis Prohibition

The public comments are not just filled with policy arguments; many include personal stories about how cannabis prohibition has affected individuals and families. These narratives range from tales of medical hardship due to lack of access to cannabis-based treatments, to accounts of lives disrupted by criminal convictions for cannabis possession.

One such story is from an individual who recounted how their brother was incarcerated for cannabis possession in the 1970s, a time when the CSA had just been enacted. This experience fueled their lifelong advocacy for cannabis reform and led them to establish some of the first legal cannabis businesses in the United States. These personal accounts add a human dimension to the policy debate, highlighting the real-world consequences of federal cannabis prohibition.

The Economic Argument for Cannabis Descheduling

Beyond the personal and societal impacts, many commenters also focused on the economic implications of cannabis prohibition. The legal cannabis industry currently employs over 600,000 Americans and generates billions of dollars in economic activity annually. Critics argue that by keeping cannabis in the CSA, the federal government has missed out on trillions of dollars in potential economic growth over the past five decades.

The comments suggest that rescheduling cannabis to Schedule 3 does not go far enough. Instead, descheduling cannabis entirely would allow for the full economic potential of the industry to be realized, including expanded research opportunities, job creation, and tax revenue.

Will the DEA Listen? The Uncertain Future of Cannabis Policy

As the DEA reviews the 43,000 comments, the big question remains: Will the federal government listen to the people? The sheer volume of comments suggests that cannabis policy is an issue that Americans care deeply about. However, the path forward is uncertain. The rescheduling process could involve litigation and face numerous legal and political challenges before a final decision is made.

Despite the challenges, the large public response may signal a turning point in the federal government's approach to cannabis policy. If the DEA and other federal agencies heed the voices of the American people, this could be a significant step toward ending the prohibition of cannabis and recognizing its medical, economic, and social value.

A Pivotal Moment in Cannabis Reform

The recent flood of public comments to the DEA underscores the importance of cannabis policy in America today. With 43,000 voices advocating for change, this may be the moment when federal cannabis laws begin to shift in a meaningful way. Whether the DEA will respond to this call for action remains to be seen, but one thing is clear: Americans are demanding a new approach to cannabis regulation, one that reflects the realities of modern science, medicine, and social justice.

The future of cannabis policy in the United States is at a crossroads, and the next steps taken by the DEA could have far-reaching implications for the nation.

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