

Cannabis Expungements Bill Introduced, Consideration for Banking Reform Package

A Democratic senator has introduced a bill aimed at creating federal incentives for states, localities, and Indian tribes to expunge low-level marijuana records. This equity-focused reform proposal has been repeatedly discussed by leadership, with potential inclusion in bipartisan cannabis banking legislation currently pending floor action.

The HOPE Act: A Path to Expungement

Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV) unveiled the Harnessing Opportunity by Pursuing Expungement (HOPE) Act on Thursday. This legislation seeks to establish a federal grant program assisting jurisdictions across the nation in facilitating cannabis clemency for individuals convicted of now-legal offenses.

Addressing Lingering Consequences

Rosen emphasized the necessity of addressing the lasting impacts of past low-level marijuana offenses, particularly in states like Nevada where cannabis is now legal. She stressed the barriers faced by individuals with prior convictions, hindering their ability to secure employment, housing, and contribute to the economy.

Bipartisan Support and House Counterpart

The HOPE Act mirrors a House version reintroduced by Representatives Dave Joyce (R-OH) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) last year. Notably, Rosen's measure extends grant eligibility to tribal entities and includes states that have reduced penalties for cannabis offenses.

Financial Support for Expungement Efforts

The legislation proposes allocating \$2 million annually from 2025 to 2034 to support the State Expungement Opportunity Grant Program. These grants could be utilized to fund technologies, legal clinics, and partnerships facilitating mass relief efforts.

Industry and Advocacy Endorsement

Industry leaders and advocates have voiced support for the HOPE Act, recognizing its potential to remove barriers to expungement and address the harms of cannabis criminalization. Organizations such as the National Cannabis Roundtable (NCR), NORML, Americans for Prosperity (AFP), and the Last Prisoner Project (LPP) endorse the legislation.

Senate Dynamics and Legislative Outlook

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has highlighted the HOPE Act as a priority for inclusion in the Secure and Fair Enforcement Regulation (SAFER) Banking Act. Bicameral negotiations are ongoing, with hopes of reaching a final agreement on broader banking regulations, paving the way for legislative advancement.

Conclusion: Advancing Cannabis Reform Efforts

While challenges remain, bipartisan support and ongoing negotiations signal momentum for cannabis banking reform and expungement initiatives. As lawmakers navigate complex legislative dynamics, the HOPE Act stands as a crucial step towards rectifying the injustices of past cannabis policies and promoting equitable access to economic opportunities.

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