

# Senate Leaders Push for Federal Cannabis Legalization Bill Ahead of April 20th

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), along with Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), are actively seeking support for a federal marijuana legalization bill that they aim to introduce later this month. The timing is set to coincide with the eve of the cannabis holiday, 4/20.

In a recent Dear Colleague letter circulated on Tuesday, the senators emphasized the growing sentiment among Americans that the War on Drugs has failed and that the federal government should respect the decisions made by states that have opted to legalize cannabis.

The proposed legislation, known as the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act (CAOA), is expected to mirror an earlier version introduced in 2022. According to the senators, the question now isn't whether cannabis should be legal—given the significant progress made at the state level—but rather, whether it should be subject to similar regulatory standards as alcohol and tobacco.

The senators highlighted the need for federal regulation to ensure the safety of cannabis products, prevent access by minors, and provide resources to address impaired driving. Moreover, they underscored the necessity of federal legislation to rectify the harms inflicted by the War on Drugs, particularly on communities of color, and to facilitate much-needed research into the effects of cannabis.

The bill is slated to be reintroduced by the end of April 2024, and senators have requested colleagues to indicate their interest in becoming original cosponsors by April 19.

While details of the latest version of the bill are not yet available, key provisions from the 2022 version include:

- 180 days of enactment.
- Implementation of federal excise taxes on cannabis producers.
- Regulation limiting cannabis sales to adults aged 21 and older.
- Expungement of low-level federal cannabis convictions and relief for those currently incarcerated for marijuana-related offenses.
- Establishment of a federal regulatory framework for the marijuana industry.
- Grant programs to support job training, reentry services, and legal aid, particularly for Removal of marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) within
- communities disproportionately impacted by the War on Drugs.
- Provisions to prevent federal benefits denial and prohibit federal employment drug testing for marijuana, except for certain sensitive positions.
- Authorization for VA physicians to recommend medical cannabis to veterans.
- Measures to prevent diversion and promote public education campaigns against youth consumption.

Despite these efforts, the bill's passage this year faces significant challenges. With Democrats holding a narrow majority in the Senate, bipartisan support would be necessary to advance the legislation. Additionally, the GOP-controlled House, led by anti-cannabis Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), is unlikely to take up the bill.

In the meantime, many advocates and stakeholders are focusing on a bipartisan marijuana banking bill that awaits floor action in the Senate before potentially advancing to the House.

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