

NH Senate Committee Votes Against Adult Use Legalization Bill

New Hampshire Senate Committee Rejects House-Passed Cannabis Possession Bill, Dealing Blow to Legalization Efforts

Concord, NH — A significant setback for adult-use cannabis legalization occurred on April 15, 2025, when the New Hampshire Senate Judiciary Committee voted 3-2 to reject House Bill 198, a bill designed to legalize adult-use cannabis possession for those aged 21 and older. The bill, which would allow individuals to possess up to 2 ounces of cannabis, 10 grams of concentrate, or 2,000 milligrams of THC, was deemed “inexpedient to legislate,” effectively recommending the full Senate kill the measure.

House Bill 198 Seeks to Legalize Possession Without a Commercial Marketplace, But Faces Opposition

The House-passed bill had garnered support for its aim to decriminalize possession of small amounts of cannabis without introducing a commercial marketplace for the sale of marijuana, an issue that has caused division between New Hampshire lawmakers in previous years. Rep. Jared Sullivan, the bill’s sponsor, emphasized that H.B. 198 aimed solely at possession and did not address the issue of retail sales, which had caused a major impasse in the past legislative session.

Disagreement Over Cannabis Sales Model Fuels Legislative Deadlock in 2024

New Hampshire’s struggle with cannabis legalization began when Senate and House lawmakers failed to reconcile differing views on the “franchise model” for state-run dispensaries in 2024, leaving the state as the only New England state not to legalize adult-use cannabis. Sullivan’s attempt with H.B. 198 in 2025 was a bid to break the deadlock by focusing only on possession, aiming to avoid conflict over the retail model that had previously derailed progress.

Rep. Sullivan Advocates for Change Amid Continued Arrests for Marijuana Possession

During the committee hearing, Rep. Sullivan highlighted that 58% of New Hampshire’s senators voted in favor of adult-use legalization in 2024, signaling broad support for reform. He stressed that 694 people were arrested for cannabis possession in 2023, many of whom face misdemeanors and the loss of employment opportunities. Sullivan’s goal, he said, was to stop the criminalization of cannabis possession for adults, pointing to national trends in states where cannabis was already legalized.

Opponents Argue That the Bill Lacks Safeguards for Public Health and Safety

Opponents of the bill, such as Sue Homola, chair of Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM), voiced concerns about the potential consequences of passing a law without establishing regulations for cannabis sales. Homola argued that the federal illegality of marijuana made it a risky policy and criticized advocates for not addressing the public health implications. Sen. Daryl Abbas, a committee vice chairman, also expressed worries about cannabis without a structured market, calling the bill an “open policy” without adequate guardrails for safe retail.

Advocates Cite Popular Support for Legalization as Polls Show Broad Backing in New Hampshire

In contrast, Karen O’Keefe, director of state policies at the Marijuana Policy Project, urged lawmakers to treat adults as responsible decision-makers, citing data from a University of New Hampshire poll showing that 65% of Granite Staters support adult-use legalization. Advocates also pointed out that, despite surrounding states passing similar measures, New Hampshire residents are still criminalized for cannabis use.

Senate Committee’s Vote Reflects Broader Debate Over Cannabis Legalization in New Hampshire

The Senate committee’s “inexpedient to legislate” motion effectively ends the latest effort to legalize cannabis possession in New Hampshire without the contentious debate over retail sales. While Sen. Tara Reardon acknowledged the strong public desire for cannabis reform, she lamented that lawmakers were focused on obstructing rather than addressing the growing reality of cannabis use in the state.

What’s Next for Cannabis Reform in New Hampshire?

With 21 other consumption lounges awaiting approval in neighboring states and New Hampshire still holding out, the future of cannabis legalization in the state remains uncertain. While advocates continue to push for more comprehensive reform, New Hampshire is once again left to contend with the challenges of balancing public health, safety, and the growing demand for adult-use cannabis reform.

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