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Florida Law Targets Ballot Measures as Pot Vote Looms

Florida's New Ballot Initiative Law Adds Hurdles for Cannabis Legalization Campaigns

DeSantis Signs Law Requiring $1M Bond, Limits Out-of-State Petitioners

In a major move that could reshape the future of Florida's citizen-led ballot initiatives—including marijuana legalization efforts—Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed a bill on Friday that tightens the rules for getting constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Among the most notable changes: citizen initiative campaigns must now post a $1 million bond before collecting signatures, are banned from using out-of-state or noncitizen petition gatherers, and face a shorter window for submitting signed petitions to election officials.

Personal Data Now Required on Petitions, Raising Privacy Concerns

In a controversial privacy move, the new law also mandates that petition signers provide either their driver's license number, voter ID card number, or last four digits of their Social Security number—information that will then become public record. Critics say the requirement could deter participation and expose citizens to identity theft.

Floridians with felony convictions are also barred from collecting petition signatures unless their voting rights have been restored, further narrowing the pool of potential volunteers.

DeSantis Says Law Will Curb Petition Fraud and Special Interests

In a social media statement over the weekend, DeSantis said the legislation will help "combat petition fraud and prevent the special interest-abuse of our constitutional amendment process." Bill sponsor Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka (R) argued it would keep "out-of-state fraudsters" and moneyed interests from hijacking Florida's constitution.

Critics Slam the Law as a Blow to Direct Democracy in Florida

Democratic lawmakers and advocacy groups are sounding alarms. State Sen. Carlos Smith (D) called the measure "the final kill shot against direct democracy," saying it was designed to block nearly all future citizen-led initiatives from reaching the ballot.

Jeff Brandes, a former Republican state senator, echoed those concerns on social media, accusing the Legislature of "moving the goalpost" to make it nearly impossible for anyone but lawmakers to pass

constitutional changes.

Cannabis Legalization Campaign Could Face Major Setbacks in 2026

The new restrictions arrive as the campaign Smart & Safe Florida gears up for another push to legalize marijuana for adults in 2026, after Amendment 3 narrowly failed last year to secure the required 60% voter approval. Backed by major cannabis companies like Trulieve, the group raised more than $150 million for its 2024 campaign.

While the campaign declined to comment on how the new law may impact its 2026 efforts, the legislation appears to complicate the path forward.

DeSantis Faces Accusations Over Misuse of State Funds Against Marijuana Measure

In a twist of political irony, some lawmakers have called for an investigation into how $10 million in state funds—including $8.5 million to a group opposing marijuana legalization—were allegedly used by DeSantis to sway public opinion against last year's initiatives.

This follows a lawsuit filed by Smart & Safe Florida, accusing the Republican Party of deceptive tactics meant to mislead voters about the marijuana measure.

State Fines Legalization Campaign Over Petition Deadlines

Florida's Office of Election Crimes and Security (OECS) recently fined Smart & Safe Florida more than $120,000, alleging the group submitted petitions past the 30-day deadline. A cease-and-desist letter warned the campaign of potential election law violations, and the matter was referred to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for investigation.

The campaign says it stands by its process, had legal counsel vet all materials, and views the accusations as politically motivated attempts to silence the public's voice.

New Law Could Also Impact Other Citizen-Led Initiatives Like Medicaid Expansion

Another group, Florida Decides HealthCare, has already filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the new law, which they say "significantly undermines" Florida's citizen-led amendment process. The group is currently working to qualify a ballot measure to expand Medicaid access in the state.

Florida Lawmakers Push to Ban Psilocybin Spores in Agriculture Bill

In a separate but related development, lawmakers recently sent DeSantis a broad agricultural bill containing a provision that bans psilocybin mushroom spores. Though spores themselves do not contain the psychoactive compounds psilocybin or psilocin, the new law would criminalize any spores "capable of producing" these substances.

Violating the ban would be a first-degree misdemeanor, carrying penalties of up to one year in jail and a $1,000 fine.

Military Veterans to Get Medical Cannabis Cards for Free Under New Reform

There was at least one win for marijuana advocates in Florida this session: lawmakers passed a bill that will waive the $75 fee for military veterans seeking medical marijuana cards. Veterans will also only need to

renew their certifications every two years instead of annually. The changes take effect July 1.

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