

Nebraska Families Plea for Medical Cannabis Access

Nebraska Advocates Continue Struggle for Safe, Regulated Medical Cannabis System, Despite Voter Approval and Ongoing Opposition

LINCOLN — Nebraska’s fight for medical cannabis has spanned over a decade, with advocates like Liz Bronson of Omaha continuing to push for a safe, regulated system after voters overwhelmingly approved its legalization in November. Liz and her husband, Matt Bronson, have lived through heart-wrenching challenges as their young son, Teddy, battles a severe form of drug-resistant epilepsy. At just 7 years old, Teddy has undergone six brain surgeries, been prescribed 14 different medications, and relied on expensive medical equipment to manage his condition.

Teddy’s seizures are so frequent and severe that, at one point, he suffered from 3,800 seizures each month, a heartbreaking ordeal for the Bronson family. Despite the odds, Teddy has shown remarkable improvement, and the Bronsons attribute much of that progress to their relentless pursuit of solutions, including medical cannabis, which they believe could alleviate his suffering.

A Mother’s Heartfelt Plea at Public Forum: ‘Teddy Matters’ and the Suffering of Nebraskans Deserve Action

At a public forum on medical cannabis regulations in Omaha on May 4, Liz Bronson stood before a packed crowd and made a passionate plea. “We come here today to say that, ‘I’m sorry, but Teddy matters,’” she said, her voice filled with emotion. “Our family matters, and the suffering individuals in this state matter.”

Matt Bronson, a disabled U.S. Air Force veteran, shared how each day with Teddy is a battle for survival, with the constant fear that one of Teddy’s seizures could be the one that takes his life. Yet, despite this overwhelming risk, Matt expressed gratitude that they still have their son.

The Bronsons’ story is a powerful testament to the ongoing struggles of families across Nebraska, where medical cannabis has been approved by voters, but implementation remains stalled due to legislative roadblocks and opposition.

More Than a Decade of Struggle: Advocates Continue to Fight for Access to Medical Cannabis

In November, Nebraska voters made their voices heard, approving medical cannabis by an overwhelming 71% margin. However, the fight for a safe and regulated system has not ended, and advocates like the Bronsons are still waiting for the state to fulfill its promises.

This ongoing struggle has involved multiple election cycles, legislative battles, and even court cases. Despite these obstacles, many advocates, including those at the recent public forums in La Vista, Omaha, and Lincoln, expressed frustration that lawmakers have failed to act in accordance with the will of the voters.

“The will of the voters must be implemented,” said one speaker at the Omaha forum. This sentiment was echoed by many, as speakers criticized the delays and compromises made by lawmakers, including the controversial Legislative Bill (LB) 677. This bill, introduced by State Sen. Ben Hansen of Blair, seeks to clarify regulations surrounding medical cannabis in Nebraska, but it has faced widespread opposition due to its restrictions.

The Compromise and Controversy of LB 677: Public Discontent Over Smoking Ban, Conditions List, and Costs

While LB 677 aims to provide some clarity, it has been met with backlash for its numerous compromises. One major point of contention is the ban on smoking cannabis, which many advocates feel undermines the intent of the voter-approved medical cannabis law. Additionally, the bill specifies 15 “qualifying conditions” for medical cannabis use, which many believe is too restrictive, and it limits the number of dispensaries to 30 across the state. The bill also requires patients or caregivers to pay up to \$45 for a registry card to access medical cannabis.

Ethan Stankus of Bellevue, who attended the Omaha forum, said that had he known about these restrictions, he would not have supported the bill. “This is not what we voted for,” Stankus remarked, holding up a breakdown of the proposed amendments to LB 677.

State Sen. Ben Hansen, the lead sponsor of LB 677, acknowledged that the bill was not perfect but argued that it was necessary to set clear parameters before the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission could begin its work. He emphasized that compromise was essential to move forward, even if it meant settling for less than 100% of the initial proposal.

“We’re not going to eat 100% of the apple,” Hansen said at the forum. “We get 75%, 80%, and make sure the people who need it, get it.”

Legal and Political Roadblocks Continue to Delay Access to Medical Cannabis for Nebraskans

Opposition to medical cannabis has continued to come from a variety of sources, including Nebraska’s Attorney General Mike Hilgers, who has argued that the legalization of medical cannabis conflicts with federal law. Hilgers, a vocal opponent of LB 677, has also supported a bill (LB 316) that would effectively reclassify hemp as marijuana, a move that advocates fear could limit access to medical cannabis products in the state.

Hilgers’ stance has created a contentious political environment, with some lawmakers warning that further delay in implementing medical cannabis regulations could lead to the legalization of recreational marijuana, something many conservative lawmakers fear. Hansen, however, argued that if medical cannabis is not regulated soon, Nebraskans might resort to recreational cannabis legalization, bypassing the original intent of the ballot measures.

Personal Stories Drive the Fight for Medical Cannabis: Advocates Share Heartbreaking Testimonies of Loss and Hope

Beyond the political debates, the personal stories shared at the public forums are what drive the fight for medical cannabis in Nebraska. Families like the Bronsons and the Gillens have fought for over a decade to gain access to a treatment that could potentially improve the lives of their loved ones.

Dominic and Shelley Gillen of Bellevue, whose son Will suffers from severe epilepsy, shared their heart-wrenching journey at the forum. Will, now 23, has endured over 450,000 seizures and is left with a body covered in scars. Dominic Gillen urged lawmakers to see the patients, not just the legal and political issues at hand. “Will has never spoken a word, but he’s touched countless lives in this state and other states through his story,” Dominic said.

For many advocates, the delay in implementing medical cannabis regulations means more families will suffer and potentially lose loved ones before they can access the relief they desperately need. “Fight for us. Fight like our lives matter,” said Lia Post, a Springfield resident and longtime medical cannabis advocate, who has a life-threatening condition of her own.

The Need for Urgent Action: Advocates Call for Immediate Relief for Patients in Nebraska

As the political and legal battles continue, one thing is clear: Nebraskans are running out of time. Families like the Bronsons, the Gillens, and many others are pleading with lawmakers to act swiftly and implement the medical cannabis system that voters approved.

“Let’s take away this pain,” said Matt Bronson, a disabled U.S. Air Force veteran, as he called on lawmakers to pass legislation that would allow families like his to access the treatment they need. With every passing day, more Nebraskans are facing suffering and death due to the lack of access to medical cannabis, and advocates are urging the state’s leaders to finally fulfill the promise made to the voters in 2024.

The struggle is far from over, but the voices of families like the Bronsons are resonating across the state, demanding that their loved ones be given the chance to live without unnecessary pain and suffering.

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