

# Nebraska Families Push for Medical Cannabis After Voter Approval

## Nebraska Families, Like the Bronsons, Fight for Medical Cannabis Access to Save Their Loved Ones

At just seven years old, Teddy Bronson, a young boy from Omaha, has faced more than most adults ever will. He has endured six brain surgeries, been prescribed 14 different medications, and used nearly half a million dollars in medical equipment to fight his drug-resistant epilepsy. This epilepsy, a condition that has caused him to suffer an average of 3,800 seizures every month, has created a constant battle for survival. But despite these overwhelming challenges, Teddy is still here, and his family is determined to do everything in their power to give him a chance at a better life.

Teddy's parents, Matt Bronson, a disabled U.S. Air Force veteran, and Liz Bronson, a nurse practitioner at Children's Nebraska, are in a relentless fight to reduce Teddy's seizures and improve his quality of life. Their fight now centers around medical cannabis, a treatment they believe could offer some relief to their son.

### Medical Cannabis as a Possible Solution for Teddy's Epilepsy

During a public forum held on May 4 in Omaha, Matt Bronson shared his family's emotional plea for action. He told the crowd that each night, Teddy is at an 85 percent higher risk of losing his life, a terrifying statistic for any parent. Despite these odds, Matt and Liz remain hopeful and resilient, starting each day with gratitude as they greet their son, who, three years ago, was confined to a wheelchair.

"I get to see my son smile, I get to hear him babble, and damn it, he is seven and a half years old and he's walking," Matt told the crowd, a mixture of exhaustion and determination in his voice. "Three years ago, he was in a wheelchair." This testament to Teddy's progress is a testament to his resilience, but it also serves as a stark reminder of how fragile his condition remains.

Despite Teddy's improvement, Liz Bronson remains cautious, aware that even one seizure could take her son's life. Her family's fight has now expanded beyond hospital rooms and medications to a broader battle to get medical cannabis legalized in Nebraska, a fight that has spanned more than a decade.

### A Decade-Long Fight for Medical Cannabis in Nebraska

The Bronsons are not alone in their struggle. For more than ten years, they, along with hundreds of other Nebraskans, have fought for access to medical cannabis. This effort has seen three election cycles, numerous legislative bills, and multiple court battles, all in the hopes of securing relief for patients like Teddy. In November 2022, the people of Nebraska overwhelmingly voted in favor of legalizing medical cannabis, with 71 percent of voters approving it. The state also voted to approve the basic regulatory framework, with 68 percent of voters in support.

However, the real challenge lies in the implementation of these laws. Nebraska's government has been slow to put the regulations into place, leaving many patients, including Teddy, without the help they need. To add to the complexity, some lawmakers, like Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers, have escalated their opposition to any legislation that involves tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient in cannabis.

During the public forums, Matt Bronson and other advocates made it clear that the voice of the voters must be heard. Medical cannabis is legal in Nebraska, and they are demanding that lawmakers honor the will of the people and implement a regulatory system that will allow patients like Teddy to access the medicine they need.

## **Challenges and Opposition to the Legalization of Medical Cannabis**

As the debate over medical cannabis continues, it has become clear that there is significant opposition to the full implementation of the ballot measures. State lawmakers have introduced several bills aimed at clarifying and regulating the medical cannabis industry, including Legislative Bill 677 (LB 677). While some supporters of the bill argue that it will help ensure clear and effective regulation, many speakers at the forums expressed dissatisfaction with compromises made within the bill.

One of the main points of contention is the ban on smoking cannabis, as well as a list of 15 qualifying conditions for medical cannabis use. Some attendees, like Ethan Stankus of Bellevue, argued that these provisions do not reflect the will of the voters. Stankus, who would have voted against the measure had he known about these compromises, questioned why Nebraskans were being asked to reexplain their vote.

## **The Ongoing Struggle: Patients Waiting for Access to Life-Changing Medicine**

The Bronsons' fight for medical cannabis is not just about Teddy. It is a fight for every patient in Nebraska who is suffering and waiting for access to a treatment that could improve their quality of life. At the public forums, other Nebraskans shared their stories of suffering, many of them having waited years for the chance to use medical cannabis. Some patients, including Jill Hessing of Lincoln, spoke about loved ones who had passed away while waiting for access to the medication.

Hessing shared the story of her mother, a compassionate woman who died of cancer in 2006. If her mother had been able to access cannabis to ease her pain, Hessing believes it could have made a significant difference. Similarly, Lia Post of Springfield spoke of her own battle with a debilitating condition, complex regional pain syndrome, and urged lawmakers to act quickly to pass a law that could save lives.

These heartfelt pleas are echoed by many Nebraskans who feel that they have been left behind by the slow-moving legislative process. They are calling for action, and they are not backing down.

## **The Legislative Roadblocks and Challenges Ahead**

While some legislators, like Sen. Ben Hansen of Blair, have pushed for clearer regulations, others have sought to stall the process. State Sen. Kathleen Kauth's LB 316, which reclassifies hemp as marijuana, is one such effort that opponents argue would severely limit access to medical cannabis.

There are also concerns about the proposed Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission, which would oversee the new regulatory framework. Critics worry that it would not have enough resources to effectively implement the laws. Some lawmakers, like Sen. Rick Holdcroft of Bellevue, have warned that the current regulatory framework cannot be completed in time to meet the July 1 deadline set by the voters.

Despite these challenges, advocates like the Bronsons remain hopeful. They continue to fight for a future in which families like theirs can access the medicine they need to survive and thrive.

## **A Call to Action: Time for Nebraska to Act**

In the end, the Bronsons, along with thousands of Nebraskans, are simply asking for one thing: the right to access medical cannabis. For families like theirs, this is not a political issue; it is a matter of life and death. They are calling on lawmakers to act quickly and implement the will of the voters, so that patients like Teddy can have access to the treatments they need.

As Matt Bronson so powerfully stated at the forum, “Let’s take away this pain.” It is a sentiment that resonates with everyone who has ever fought for the right to live without constant suffering. Nebraska’s lawmakers now have the opportunity to honor the will of the voters and take a meaningful step toward improving the lives of thousands of patients across the state. The time to act is now.

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