

Senate Committee Raises Concerns Over Low THC Cannabis Bill

Texas Senate State Affairs Committee Raises Significant Concerns Over Expansive House Bill Seeking to Increase Access to Low THC Medical Cannabis

A hearing convened Monday morning by the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee revealed a series of concerns regarding House Bill 46, which proposes significant changes to the state's low-THC medical cannabis program. The bill aims to broaden patient access, increase the number of licensed providers, and introduce new delivery methods such as inhalers. However, some lawmakers voiced apprehension that the bill's wide scope could lead to unintended consequences.

House Bill 46 Seeks to Expand Compassionate Use Program by Increasing Providers and Patient Eligibility, Introducing New Medication Delivery Options

House Bill 46 represents a legislative effort to enhance the Texas Compassionate Use Program (CUP), which has been operating since 2015 to provide low-THC cannabis to patients with qualifying medical conditions. The bill proposes increasing the maximum number of licensed dispensaries from the current three to 11, expanding patient eligibility, and allowing pulmonary inhalation as a new method for medication delivery. The proposed expansion is intended to address logistical challenges faced by current dispensaries, which are all located in Austin and must transport medication long distances to patients statewide. This often results in inefficiencies and delays when patients are unavailable to receive their prescriptions.

Comparison Between House Bill 46 and Senate Bill 1505 Highlights Differences in Approach to Expanding Medical Cannabis Access

Senator Charles Perry, who sponsored House Bill 46 and authored Senate Bill 1505—the Senate companion bill—explained key differences between the two legislative proposals. Senate Bill 1505 calls for a more modest increase in dispensaries, limiting licenses to six rather than the 11 permitted under the House bill. Additionally, the Senate bill defines low-THC cannabis dosage at a maximum of five milligrams per dose, whereas the House bill allows up to 20 milligrams. These differences reflect contrasting philosophies on how best to regulate and control the state's medical cannabis market while balancing patient access and public safety concerns.

Current Limitations of Texas Medical Cannabis Distribution Highlight Inefficiencies Addressed by Proposed Legislation

Texas currently licenses three dispensaries, all centralized in Austin, which must transport their inventory to patients throughout the state. This system creates practical challenges, especially for patients in rural or

distant urban areas, resulting in delays and logistical inefficiencies. If a patient is unavailable to receive their medication, dispensaries must return the product to Austin, compounding the problem. Both bills aim to resolve these issues by permitting satellite dispensary locations closer to patients, improving access and reducing transportation burdens.

Industry Stakeholders Support Measures to Increase Accessibility, Introduce New Medication Forms, and Reduce Costs for Patients

During the Senate hearing, representatives from licensed dispensaries expressed cautious support for the legislation. The CEO of Texas Original Compassionate Cultivation emphasized the need for increased accessibility through additional dispensary licenses and satellite facilities. The testimony highlighted that allowing new delivery methods such as pulmonary inhalers could benefit patients who have difficulty with existing consumption forms. Industry leaders also underscored the potential for these legislative changes to reduce medication costs, making treatment more affordable for Texas patients.

Legislative Process Continues With Senate Committee Substitute Expected, Influenced by Related Senate Bill 3 on Hemp Regulations

Senator Perry indicated that a committee substitute for House Bill 46 is currently being drafted and will be informed by the ongoing legislative process, particularly the upcoming vote on Senate Bill 3 in the Texas House. Senate Bill 3 seeks to impose stricter regulations on consumable hemp products, including new fees and criminal penalties, signaling a broader legislative effort to regulate cannabis and hemp markets in the state. The fate of House Bill 46 will likely be intertwined with the outcomes related to Senate Bill 3, as lawmakers work to align cannabis and hemp regulations into a comprehensive policy package.

Broader Context of Texas Cannabis Policy Reflects Legislative Balancing Act Between Expanding Medical Access and Ensuring Regulatory Control

Texas' cautious approach to medical cannabis contrasts with more expansive programs in other states, and the current debate illustrates the state's struggle to balance patient needs with concerns about public safety and regulatory oversight. Lawmakers are navigating a complex landscape where the expansion of cannabis access could improve quality of life for many patients but also carries risks if not properly managed. The legislative process surrounding House Bill 46 and Senate Bill 1505 reflects this ongoing effort to find a middle ground that addresses access while minimizing potential abuses or unintended outcomes.

Future Outlook for Texas Medical Cannabis Expansion Hinges on Legislative Negotiations and Regulatory Framework Development

As Texas legislators continue discussions on medical cannabis policy, the final version of House Bill 46, along with its Senate counterpart and related hemp regulations, will determine the future of low-THC cannabis access in the state. Stakeholders from the medical community, industry, and government will closely monitor the evolving legislation, weighing benefits such as increased accessibility and affordability against potential concerns over market expansion and regulatory challenges. The legislative session ahead promises to shape how Texas navigates this contentious and rapidly developing policy area.

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