

Medical Cannabis Bill Stalls in Nebraska Legislature

Nebraska Legislature Blocks Medical Cannabis Regulation Despite Overwhelming Voter Support

Legislative Bill 677 Falters Amid Filibuster and Fierce Opposition From State Leadership

LINCOLN, Neb. Despite strong support from Nebraska voters in the November 2024 election, Legislative Bill 677 (LB 677), designed to help implement the state's new medical cannabis laws, failed in the Nebraska Legislature on Tuesday. The bill did not receive the 33 votes required to overcome a filibuster, ending in a narrow 23-22 vote and leaving Nebraska's new voter-backed cannabis framework in limbo.

Voter Mandates Face Legislative Gridlock as Republican Lawmakers Withhold Support

In November, Nebraskans voted with 71% in favor of legalizing medical cannabis for up to 5 ounces with a physician's recommendation. An accompanying regulatory framework was passed by 67% of voters. Despite this clear public mandate, key political figures, including Governor Jim Pillen, Attorney General Mike Hilgers, and U.S. Senator Pete Ricketts, publicly opposed LB 677, influencing enough lawmakers to block its passage.

Although the bill enjoyed bipartisan support—including eight Republicans, 14 Democrats, and one progressive independent—several Republicans opted to abstain. State Sens. John Arch, Carolyn Bosn, and Merv Riepe were present but did not vote, a move seen by supporters as tacit resistance.

Bill Sponsor Appeals to Conscience and Compassion Amid Conservative Pushback

LB 677 was introduced by State Sen. Ben Hansen, a Republican from Blair, who emphasized the bill's conservative values and medical focus. He argued that support for medical cannabis is consistent with acknowledging the potential relief it offers patients suffering from chronic conditions. Hansen's emotional plea was echoed by freshman State Sen. Glen Meyer, who voiced hope that the legislature could come together to offer meaningful medical solutions.

Despite these appeals, legislative opponents argued the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission, created by voters and granted exclusive regulatory power, should act first before legislative intervention. They cautioned against premature regulation and cited the need for careful deliberation, especially given ongoing legal disputes about the ballot initiative process.

Opposition Rallies Around Legal and Procedural Concerns as Attorney General Challenges Ballot Legitimacy

Attorney General Hilgers has questioned the legality of the ballot measures, asserting they may have been improperly placed on the ballot. His office appeared in court the same day as the vote to request dismissal of a citizen-led case so that the state could pursue its own legal challenge. Hilgers also orchestrated opposition from law enforcement associations, including sheriffs and police chiefs across Nebraska.

Supporters of LB 677 dismissed these arguments as delay tactics and expressed frustration with attempts to undermine the electorate's will. They emphasized that the medical cannabis commission has not yet acted and that proactive legislation could ensure the system is safe, transparent, and patient-focused.

Emotional Appeals From Lawmakers and Advocates Fail to Shift the Outcome

Several senators, including John Fredrickson, Dan Quick, and George Dungan, highlighted the real-life consequences of inaction. Quick, whose son has long battled substance use disorders, argued that medical cannabis could offer an alternative to dangerous opioids. Fredrickson emphasized that fears of youth corruption were overblown and rooted in outdated stigma.

The bill's supporters repeatedly noted that LB 677 was requested by the same voters and organizations that successfully championed the ballot initiatives. Unlike unrelated efforts to water down voter-approved wage and leave laws, LB 677 was crafted to align with voter intent, not contradict it.

Opponents Question Timing and Urge Patience as Legal Battles Loom

Leading opposition came from freshman State Sen. Jared Storm and others who argued that LB 677 was an unnecessary intrusion into the newly formed regulatory body. State Sen. Tanya Storer called the urgency political theater, while Sen. Mike Jacobson expressed concern that enacting the law now would damage pending legal arguments in the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Other lawmakers, such as Sen. Rob Dover, questioned why the Legislature should act before the full commission is confirmed and operational. Critics warned that LB 677 could compromise the state's legal position and encourage future fraud in the ballot process.

Advocates Vow to Continue Fight as Political Stakes Rise Ahead of 2026 Elections

Despite the defeat, supporters, including Crista Eggers of Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, vowed to keep fighting. Eggers, whose son suffers from severe seizures, has been a leading voice in the medical cannabis movement for over a decade. During Tuesday's debate, one longtime advocate reportedly experienced multiple seizures, underscoring the urgency felt by many families.

Sen. Hansen warned that the failure of LB 677 could speed up a shift toward full recreational marijuana legalization, possibly appearing on the 2026 ballot. That year, Nebraska voters will also weigh in on races for governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and half of the state legislature's seats.

Patient Needs and Public Mandate Collide With Political Power Structures

Ultimately, the demise of LB 677 represents a political impasse between an energized grassroots movement and entrenched state leadership. Public approval for medical cannabis was recorded in every one of Nebraska's 49 legislative districts, yet the state's most powerful figures have slowed or blocked its implementation at every turn.

Many supporters argue that this disconnect between lawmakers and voters damages trust in democratic institutions. Sen. Danielle Conrad described the situation as a calculated attempt by elected officials to "ruin

the lives of grassroots activists.” She and others highlighted the hypocrisy of lawmakers who cite voter will selectively, using it to support some initiatives while dismissing others.

The Future of Medical Cannabis in Nebraska Remains Uncertain But Active

While LB 677 may be dead for now, the fight for medical cannabis in Nebraska is far from over. Advocates are regrouping, and lawmakers like Hansen and Conrad remain committed to legislative efforts. Meanwhile, all eyes are on the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission, whose upcoming regulatory actions could dictate the next chapter in the state’s cannabis policy.

For now, patients and advocates are left waiting again as politics, litigation, and ideology stall what voters have already demanded.

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