

Virginia's Cannabis Sales Future Hinges on Governor's Race

When Will Virginia Finally Launch Adult-Use Cannabis Sales?

Virginia remains the only U.S. state to have legalized adult-use cannabis without establishing a regulated retail market, a delay driven by repeated vetoes from outgoing Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

Now, with Youngkin termed out and voters set to elect his successor in November, the timeline for launching legal cannabis sales in the commonwealth will likely be decided at the ballot box, according to Richmond-based CBS affiliate WTVR-6.

Legislative Efforts Blocked by Vetoes

For the past two years, Virginia's Democratic-controlled legislature has approved bills to create a retail cannabis market for adults 21 and older. Each time, however, Youngkin vetoed the measures, citing concerns over potential links to "gang activity and violent crime."

Youngkin's exit opens the door for new leadership to revisit the issue—but the state's next governor will play a pivotal role in shaping cannabis policy.

Democratic Candidate Backs Legal Sales

Democratic gubernatorial nominee **Abigail Spanberger**, a former member of Congress, has pledged to make adult-use cannabis sales a reality in Virginia.

In a statement to WTVR, Spanberger said she plans to work with the General Assembly to create a "safe, transparent" retail market that bolsters the economy while ensuring public safety.

She emphasized that cannabis tax revenue should be reinvested in Virginia communities, particularly in education and public services.

Republican Opponent Has a Record of Opposition

Lt. Gov. **Winsome Earle-Sears**, widely viewed as the leading Republican candidate, declined to comment for WTVR. However, she has previously taken a hard stance against legalization.

In a 2021 appearance, Earle-Sears said adult-use cannabis “will destroy us” and called marijuana a “gateway drug.” She has also cited personal business experience, recalling that she once fired an employee after discovering they used cannabis.

Her past remarks have earned her an “F” rating from the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

Economic Stakes for Virginia

The economic potential of a regulated adult-use cannabis market in Virginia is significant. Currently, Virginia operates only a medical marijuana program, which is expected to generate **\$59 million in sales this year**. Critics argue the state is losing out on hundreds of millions in potential tax revenue and thousands of jobs while consumers turn to Maryland’s legal market, hemp-derived THC products, or the illicit market.

The most recent vetoed legislation would have granted initial adult-use retail licenses exclusively to the state’s existing medical cannabis operators, which include large multistate companies such as:

- Ayr Wellness
- The Cannabist Co.
- Green Thumb Industries
- Jushi Holdings
- Verano Holdings Corp.

What Comes Next

Virginia’s cannabis future now hinges on November’s gubernatorial election. A Spanberger win could accelerate efforts to create a regulated market, while an Earle-Sears victory could prolong the state’s status as an outlier legalizing possession without providing a regulated system for sales.

For businesses, patients, and consumers alike, the upcoming vote may determine whether Virginia finally joins the growing list of states with legal adult-use cannabis markets or continues to stall amid political divides.

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