

New Hampshire Lawmakers Advance Cannabis Bill Despite Veto Threat

New Hampshire Lawmakers Advance Cannabis Legalization Bill Despite Governor's Firm Opposition

On September 11, 2025, a New Hampshire House committee confirmed its intention to move forward with a marijuana legalization bill, setting the stage for another round of debate in Concord. While lawmakers widely acknowledge that the measure is unlikely to survive opposition in the Senate or a likely veto from Governor Kelly Ayotte, House members emphasized the importance of advancing the proposal as a matter of principle and political accountability.

A Familiar Legislative Battle With High Stakes for 2025

The discussion unfolded during a House Commerce and Consumer Affairs Committee hearing, where sponsor Rep. Jared Sullivan (D) urged colleagues not to back down in the face of long-standing resistance. The chamber has passed legalization legislation multiple times in recent years, only to see it stall in the Senate or face gubernatorial opposition. Sullivan argued that the House should maintain its consistent stance, highlighting widespread voter support for legalization and framing the debate as a matter of political courage.

An Alternative Approach: THC Beverages in State Liquor Stores

Committee Chairman Rep. John Hunt (R) floated an alternative strategy that would limit legalization to low-dose cannabis beverages, capped at 5 milligrams of THC per serving, sold exclusively through the state's government-run liquor stores. Hunt described the approach as a way to regulate cannabis like alcohol while addressing one of the most common objections to legalization: the smell of marijuana flower.

"We would be treating it just like alcohol in terms of our regulatory authority," Hunt explained. By restricting sales to sealed, canned beverages, he argued, lawmakers could sidestep concerns about smoking, odor, and unregulated distribution.

Despite calling the idea a "brilliant" potential solution, Hunt acknowledged the likely futility of any legalization bill under the current administration. "Knowing full well that the governor is going to veto no matter what we do, then is it really worth it to pursue this?" he asked.

Sullivan Pushes Back: A Broader Legalization Vision

Sullivan countered that pursuing only cannabis beverages would water down the broader legalization effort and risk alienating voters who have long called for comprehensive reform. He suggested that Hunt's proposal could be explored separately, but insisted the main bill should remain intact.

"The smoking fear is not the hurdle," Sullivan argued. "The hurdle is the corrupt model that would have been in place with that system—or what we thought would be corrupt." He was referring to last session, when former Governor Chris Sununu briefly supported a state-run cannabis market, a plan that failed after the House rejected it as unworkable and overly centralized.

For Sullivan, keeping the House bill consistent with past efforts is about more than symbolism. "Most people in this state want it," he said, stressing that lawmakers should not make it easier for the governor to campaign against legalization in 2026.

Governor Ayotte Holds Firm on Opposition

Governor Kelly Ayotte (R) has been clear and consistent in her opposition to legalization. Last month, she reiterated her stance, even as the federal government under President Donald Trump considers rescheduling marijuana under federal law.

"If federal law changes, I have to comply with federal law," Ayotte said. "But my position has been, and continues to be, that we should not legalize marijuana in the future."

Her firm position means that even if the bill passes the House and garners enough attention in the Senate, its prospects remain slim.

Broader Cannabis Policy Battles in the State

The legalization bill is not the only cannabis-related measure under consideration in New Hampshire. Earlier this year, the House added provisions to a Senate-passed bill that would have allowed medical marijuana patients to cultivate cannabis at home. However, those provisions were stripped during conference negotiations, reflecting the ongoing difficulty of expanding cannabis rights in the state.

Advocates argue that New Hampshire is increasingly out of step with its neighbors. Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts all have legal recreational cannabis markets, leaving the Granite State as the lone holdout in northern New England. Proponents say this not only limits personal freedoms but also deprives the state of potential tax revenue and economic growth.

What Comes Next for the Legalization Bill

The House Commerce and Consumer Affairs Committee is expected to vote on whether to advance the legalization bill to the full House in the coming weeks. While the outcome in the lower chamber is largely predictable—given its history of supporting legalization the measure's fate in the Senate and with the governor is much less certain.

For advocates like Sullivan, however, the point is not just about immediate success but about drawing clear lines ahead of the next election. By repeatedly passing legalization bills, the House forces the Senate and governor to publicly reject them, keeping the issue visible for voters who may ultimately decide its fate at the ballot box.

As the debate moves forward, one thing is clear: marijuana legalization will remain a defining and divisive issue in New Hampshire politics, shaping not only legislative priorities but also the political fortunes of those

at the center of the fight.

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