

Illinois Hemp Industry on Edge as Gov. Pritzker Weighs Ban

Hemp industry advocates in Illinois are on high alert after Gov. JB Pritzker signaled he may use executive authority to ban intoxicating hemp-derived THC products. The warning has sparked anxiety among businesses and entrepreneurs in a market already shaped by ongoing battles between hemp operators and the state's \$2 billion regulated cannabis industry.

Growing Concerns About Hemp-Derived THC in Illinois

The controversy stems from products containing hemp-derived cannabinoids such as delta-8 and delta-10 THC, which surged in popularity after passage of the 2018 Farm Bill. These compounds, synthesized or extracted from hemp, produce psychoactive effects similar to marijuana but have been widely available in gas stations, convenience stores, and online markets without age restrictions.

Critics argue that the absence of regulation creates public health risks. Many lawmakers and regulators have expressed concern about products marketed in colorful packaging that resembles candy or soda, raising alarms about potential exposure to minors.

At the Chicago City Council, several aldermen have proposed restrictions, with some going as far as calling for ward-level bans. The debate has added pressure on state officials to act swiftly.

Pritzker Threatens Executive Action

Gov. Pritzker, long viewed as a reliable supporter of Illinois' licensed marijuana sector, delivered a sharp warning last week: regulate hemp-derived THC products through legislation or face an outright ban via executive order.

"My preference is a thoughtful regulatory framework," Pritzker told reporters, according to Axios. "But if lawmakers fail to act, I won't allow an unregulated intoxicant market to persist unchecked."

The governor's stance echoes actions taken by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who issued an executive order in 2024 that effectively banned the sale of hemp-derived THC products across his state. If Illinois follows California's path, it could set off a domino effect across the Midwest and beyond.

Federal Inaction Pushes States to Lead

At the federal level, efforts to regulate hemp-derived intoxicants have repeatedly stalled. While Congress has debated measures to either ban synthetic cannabinoids or create a national regulatory framework, no meaningful legislation has passed.

That vacuum has left states to make their own rules. Wisconsin Republicans recently introduced a proposal to ban intoxicating hemp-derived THC altogether, joining a growing list of statehouses considering similar steps.

Without federal guidance, states are left balancing two powerful constituencies: hemp entrepreneurs who argue for regulation and marijuana license holders who see hemp THC products as unfair competition.

Hemp Businesses Push for Regulation, Not Prohibition

For hemp advocates and entrepreneurs, the uncertainty is alarming. Many say they welcome rules and oversight but fear an outright ban would devastate a growing industry.

Jake Bullock, co-founder and CEO of Cann, a popular hemp-derived THC beverage brand, has been vocal about the need for regulation. He argues that companies like his are producing responsibly dosed beverages targeted at adult consumers—not the untested edibles often found in gas stations.

Industry representatives warn that banning hemp THC products will only drive demand into illicit channels, undermining consumer safety and costing the state millions in potential tax revenue.

Cannabis Industry Support for a Ban

Licensed cannabis operators, however, see the issue differently. Illinois marijuana businesses face strict testing, packaging, and distribution requirements that add significant costs. They argue hemp-derived THC products, often sold without oversight, undercut their prices and siphon customers away from the regulated market.

Supporters of a ban contend that a clear prohibition would protect both consumers and the integrity of Illinois' adult-use cannabis program, which has generated billions in sales and tax revenue since legalization in 2020.

What Happens Next for Illinois?

The pressure now rests on Illinois lawmakers, who will likely face intense lobbying from both sides when they reconvene. Hemp industry leaders are expected to push for a bill modeled on alcohol regulations, where products are restricted to licensed channels and monitored for potency.

Meanwhile, Pritzker's threat of executive action looms large. If legislators cannot find common ground, the governor could act unilaterally as early as this fall, potentially mirroring California's sweeping ban.

Broader Implications for the U.S. Hemp Market

Illinois' decision could have national consequences. As one of the largest cannabis markets in the country, its policies often set the tone for neighboring states. A ban in Illinois may embolden lawmakers in states like Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan to pursue similar measures, reshaping the hemp-derived THC landscape.

For now, hemp businesses, marijuana operators, and consumers remain in limbo waiting to see whether Illinois becomes the next flashpoint in the ongoing clash between regulation, prohibition, and consumer demand.