

DeSantis Says Voters Back Legal Weed Despite His Opposition

DeSantis Concedes Cannabis Legalization Is Popular Among Florida Voters but Says Blocking It Was “Morally Right”

Governor Ron DeSantis Acknowledges Public Support for Legal Marijuana but Stands Firm on Opposition

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has admitted that a majority of voters in his state support marijuana legalization but says he remains opposed, insisting that stopping legalization was the “morally right” thing to do.

Speaking at a recent event hosted by the Pennsylvania Family Institute, DeSantis reflected on Florida’s 2024 ballot initiatives, including a cannabis legalization measure and a reproductive rights proposal. While both initiatives won majority support from voters, they failed to clear the state’s unusually high 60 percent threshold for passing constitutional amendments.

DeSantis acknowledged the popularity of the marijuana initiative, known as Amendment 3, but defended his administration’s active opposition. He described cannabis as “dangerous stuff” and claimed that legalization would have opened the door to widespread public consumption and corporate monopolies.

Governor’s Admission: “More People Probably Agreed with Them Than with Me”

In his remarks, DeSantis conceded that the cannabis campaign resonated more strongly with voters than his anti-legalization stance.

“They were pushing issues in which probably more people agreed with them than agreed with me,” he said, referring to both the marijuana and abortion ballot measures. “Marijuana was somewhat popular. I didn’t do it to be popular. I did it because it was the right thing to do.”

The governor argued that while supporting legalization may have been politically convenient, it would not have been “morally right.” Instead, he saw it as his duty to protect Florida residents from what he views as harmful social and health consequences associated with cannabis use.

Opposition Fueled by Concerns About Public Use and Corporate Advantage

DeSantis claimed the failed 2024 marijuana amendment would have done more than simply legalize adult use. He alleged that it would have created a “constitutional right to possess and smoke it, including in public,” while disproportionately benefiting large cannabis companies such as Trulieve, which was the primary financial backer of the Smart & Safe Florida campaign.

According to DeSantis, pro-legalization campaigns in Florida spent a combined \$280 million on advertising \$150 million from the cannabis initiative and \$130 million from the reproductive rights campaign. He criticized these campaigns as being backed by “special interests” seeking to reshape Florida into a more permissive state “through the back door,” similar to California.

Despite those criticisms, DeSantis admitted that his opposition put him at odds with popular opinion. “Most people in my position are told to stay away from this,” he said. “All you’re going to do is alienate supporters. But that wouldn’t be the right thing to do.”

A Governor’s Fight Against a Growing Movement

While governors typically play no formal role in the ballot initiative process, DeSantis was unusually vocal. He raised funds, campaigned publicly, and leveraged his platform to oppose both measures. “We dug in. We barnstormed the state. We made the case to the people of Florida,” he said proudly. “We were the first state not just to defeat abortion but also marijuana—and we did it in the same year, in the same election, against \$280 million.”

His comments underscore how strongly he views marijuana as a societal threat. “You can’t function as a state if you smell marijuana everywhere—if these kids are doing it,” he said. “And this isn’t the marijuana they had in Woodstock. This is really dangerous stuff, so it would have been terrible for Florida.”

DeSantis’ framing aligns with long-standing conservative resistance to cannabis reform, even as public opinion continues to shift in favor of legalization nationwide.

Florida Voters Still Favor Legalization Despite 2024 Defeat

Polls consistently show that a majority of Floridians support legalizing marijuana for adult use. Leading up to the 2024 vote, multiple surveys found that between 63 and 68 percent of voters favored legalization enough for majority support but just shy of the 60 percent threshold needed to amend the state constitution.

The 2024 measure fell short largely due to organized opposition from law enforcement groups, including the Florida Police Chiefs Association and the Florida Sheriffs Association, both of which warned that legalization could lead to increased impaired driving, youth access, and workplace issues.

Still, advocates see the close result as proof that public opinion is on their side. The Smart & Safe Florida coalition, led by Trulieve and supported by other industry players, has already begun collecting signatures for a new initiative targeting the 2026 ballot.

A New Push for 2026: Revised Amendment Addresses DeSantis’ Concerns

The 2026 version of the marijuana legalization initiative has been updated to address some of the criticisms raised during the 2024 campaign. Specifically, it includes language prohibiting public smoking and vaping, and clarifies that the state legislature must set rules for regulating “the time, place, and manner of public consumption.”

As of mid-2025, Florida election officials report that the campaign has collected over 75 percent of the required signatures to qualify for the 2026 ballot. Advocates hope the revised proposal will reassure skeptical voters while maintaining broad bipartisan support.

However, DeSantis remains pessimistic about its chances. Earlier this year, he declared that the new initiative is in “big time trouble” with the state Supreme Court, predicting it would not be allowed on the ballot.

Ironically, he made a similar prediction about the 2024 version—only for the court to approve its language for a public vote.

Conflicting Polls Highlight Political Divide

While overall support for legalization in Florida remains strong, Republican voters are significantly less enthusiastic than Democrats or independents. A poll conducted in early 2025 showed that 67 percent of all voters back legalization, including 82 percent of Democrats, 66 percent of independents, and 55 percent of Republicans.

However, a Florida Chamber of Commerce poll found only 53 percent of likely voters in favor—below the threshold needed to pass an amendment. Another survey of Republican voters showed just 40 percent support within that demographic.

This political divide mirrors the broader national split, where Republican leadership often lags behind their voter base in supporting cannabis reform.

Restrictive Ballot Rules Could Hinder Future Efforts

In a move that could further complicate legalization efforts, DeSantis signed a GOP-backed bill in June 2025 tightening the rules around ballot initiatives. The new law increases signature verification requirements and imposes stricter timelines, making it more difficult for citizen-led campaigns to qualify measures for statewide votes.

Advocates argue that these restrictions are designed to stifle direct democracy in Florida and prevent voters from enacting reforms that the legislature refuses to consider.

Meanwhile, within the state legislature, some lawmakers are moving in the opposite direction pushing for incremental cannabis-related protections. A state senator recently filed bills that would safeguard employment and parental rights for medical marijuana patients, signaling that at least some policymakers recognize the need for reform.

Popular Support vs. Political Resistance

Governor Ron DeSantis's admission that marijuana legalization is popular among Floridians marks a notable moment in Florida's ongoing debate over cannabis policy. His acknowledgment of widespread voter support contrasts sharply with his continued opposition, illustrating the tension between public will and political ideology.

While DeSantis insists his stance is rooted in moral conviction and concern for public safety, his critics argue it reflects outdated attitudes that fail to align with modern science or public opinion.

With a new legalization measure on the horizon for 2026 and growing momentum among voters, Florida appears poised for another high-stakes showdown over the future of cannabis in the Sunshine State.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

© Copyright 2025 Cannabis Risk Manager. All Rights Reserved