

Dirty Tricks Alleged in Massachusetts Anti Cannabis Campaign

Campaign to End Massachusetts Cannabis Legalization Faces Allegations of Deceptive Signature Tactics

Petition Drive Aims to Recriminalize Recreational Marijuana in a \$1.6 Billion Market

A ballot initiative campaign seeking to dismantle Massachusetts' \$1.6 billion adult-use cannabis industry is under scrutiny after reports surfaced alleging that some of its signature gatherers used misleading tactics to convince voters to sign petitions.

The campaign, officially known as the Act to Restore Sensible Marijuana Policy, denies any connection to individuals accused of deception. Yet, even if the claims were true, experts say such behavior—however unethical—may fall under constitutionally protected free speech.

The High Stakes: What the Ballot Initiative Would Do

If approved for the 2026 ballot and passed by a simple majority, the proposal would outlaw adult-use cannabis sales in Massachusetts. Medical marijuana programs, however, would remain legal.

To make the ballot, organizers must collect at least 75,000 valid voter signatures by Dec. 3, 2025—a target they plan to exceed by gathering over 100,000.

Allegations of “Bait-and-Switch” Tactics Emerge

Reports from voters suggest that some signature gatherers have misrepresented the petition's purpose, telling passersby it would, for example, “take fentanyl off our streets” rather than recriminalize cannabis.

Josh Wallis, a tattoo artist from Medford, said he encountered one such signature collector outside a supermarket on October 27. After learning the petition's true intent, Wallis filed complaints with local law enforcement and the state Elections Division.

However, he was informed that petition signature gathering is a protected free speech activity, restricted only by reasonable time, place, and manner regulations.

Campaign Denies Connection to Misleading Collectors

Responding to inquiries, campaign spokesperson and Republican strategist Wendy Wakeman admitted that the movement employs paid signature gatherers but denied any link to the individuals accused of deception.

“The committee does not support misrepresenting the petition in any way at all,” Wakeman told *MJBizDaily*. “People are trained on what the petition asks. We are comfortable saying we want to roll back recreational marijuana—that’s the message.”

Wakeman called the voter complaints “troubling,” adding that such actions “would not be encouraged or sanctioned by the committee.”

Experts: Misleading Signature Tactics Are Legal—But Problematic

Though distasteful, experts say deceptive petitioning is neither new nor illegal. Across the country, similar allegations have emerged in various ballot initiatives—from abortion rights to tax reform.

In Massachusetts, a 2015 Supreme Judicial Court ruling invalidated a law that made false political statements a crime, affirming broad free speech protections for political activity.

“These actors engage in deceptive tactics because they know they cannot win on policy,” said Emma Sharkey, a partner at the Elias Law Group, which specializes in election law.

Public Opinion Remains Strongly Pro-Legalization

Despite the campaign’s efforts, data suggests that Massachusetts voters remain firmly in favor of legal cannabis.

Since legalization passed in 2016 with 56% approval, public support has only grown. A 2024 MassInc poll found that 65% of registered voters continue to support legal cannabis access.

Who Is Funding the Recriminalization Effort?

The controversy also raises larger questions about who’s financing the campaign.

Paid signature gatherers are expensive, and according to Ballotpedia, the average cost per required signature during the 2022 midterms was roughly \$13.

To secure enough valid signatures, the Massachusetts campaign may need to spend millions of dollars. Yet, Wakeman declined to reveal any funding sources or organizations backing the effort, saying disclosure forms are not due until January 2025.

Industry Advocates Cry Foul and Call for Accountability

Leaders in the state’s cannabis sector are calling the alleged deception a threat to voter integrity.

“This is voter fraud that people should report to their local town hall,” said David O’Brien, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Cannabis Business Association.

He urged campaign leaders to take immediate action to stop any misleading practices: “Whether they’re paid or volunteer, she has the responsibility to tell them publicly to stop lying to voters.”

A Fight Over Truth, Freedom, and the Future of Cannabis

While the campaign insists it is operating above board, the controversy underscores a deeper tension between free speech and ethical campaigning in ballot politics.

As Massachusetts' cannabis market continues to thrive, the 2026 initiative could become one of the most contentious and closely watched policy battles in the country.

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