

Trump Marijuana Order May Strengthen WV Legalization Effort

Trump Cannabis Rescheduling Order Could Shift West Virginia's Cannabis Debate

President Donald Trump's directive to complete the federal rescheduling of marijuana may help move long-stalled cannabis reform efforts forward in West Virginia, according to one of the state's most powerful Republican lawmakers.

House Speaker Roger Hanshaw (R) said the president's order to move cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act could give hesitant lawmakers political cover as legalization and decriminalization proposals resurface during the current legislative session.

Bipartisan Signals Emerge As Adult Use Bills Return

With multiple cannabis-related proposals again on the table in both chambers, Hanshaw suggested that bipartisan momentum may be building. He pointed out that not only Democrats but also members of the Republican caucus have introduced adult-use legalization bills in recent years.

"We've had members of the Republican party file adult-use legalization bills," Hanshaw told *The Herald-Dispatch*, referencing legislation sponsored this session by Del. Evan Hansen (D).

Hanshaw acknowledged that some Republicans still oppose legalization for philosophical or ideological reasons, but said Trump's recent executive order could ease internal resistance.

"The symbolic value of the president's order matters," he said, noting that federal action may help lawmakers feel more comfortable backing reform at the state level.

Hansen's Legalization Proposal Awaits Committee Action

Hansen's bill, now pending before the House Judiciary Committee, would establish a regulated system for adult-use cannabis sales in West Virginia. The lawmaker has introduced similar proposals in previous sessions, but none have advanced to enactment.

Whether federal rescheduling changes the outcome this year remains unclear. Moving marijuana to Schedule III would not legalize cannabis nationwide, but lawmakers in several states have suggested the shift could legitimize reform efforts and prompt new legislative action.

Senate Considers Cannabis Decriminalization Measure

In the West Virginia Senate, Minority Leader Mike Woelfel (D) is leading a separate effort focused on decriminalization rather than full legalization. His bill would reduce possession of up to 15 grams of marijuana from a misdemeanor offense to a civil infraction, eliminating the possibility of jail time.

The proposal has been referred to the Senate Health and Human Resources Committee. Committee Chairman Brian Helton (R) said he is open to discussing the legislation.

“I’ll certainly meet with [the sponsor], and we’ll talk about his bill,” Helton said, adding that all legislation before the committee remains under review.

A Narrow Window For Action This Session

Lawmakers face a tight timeline to act on cannabis reform. The legislative session is scheduled to conclude on March 14, limiting opportunities for lengthy debate or significant amendments.

At the federal level, uncertainty also remains. While Trump ordered Attorney General Pam Bondi to expedite the rescheduling process, there is no clear timeline for when the rule could be finalized.

Medical Cannabis Challenges Add Pressure For Reform

Pressure to revisit marijuana policy has been growing in West Virginia, particularly as medical cannabis patients contend with high prices that have pushed some consumers to seek products in neighboring states with adult-use markets.

State officials have also drawn criticism for leaving millions of dollars in medical marijuana tax and licensing revenue unspent since the program launched. Banking complications tied to federal prohibition have contributed to the delays, according to state leaders, including the treasurer.

Past Republican Support Hints At Possible Shift

Before leaving office, former Senate Majority Leader Craig Blair (R) said in 2024 that legalizing marijuana could help address West Virginia’s devastating fentanyl overdose crisis, predicting that reform would arrive “sooner than later.”

Former Gov. Jim Justice (R) similarly indicated in 2021 that while he was not personally in favor of legalization, he would have signed a bill had the legislature approved one.

Public Support Exists, But Progress Has Been Slow

Despite polling that has shown majority voter support for legalization, West Virginia has moved cautiously. Efforts to decriminalize marijuana through municipal ballot initiatives have repeatedly failed, including attempts in 2019, 2021 and 2022.

Still, with renewed legislative interest, bipartisan sponsorship and a changing federal posture, advocates see this session as another potential inflection point.

Whether Trump’s rescheduling order ultimately proves decisive remains to be seen but for the first time in years, top Republican leadership in West Virginia is publicly acknowledging that cannabis reform may be closer than it appears.

