

City Council Calls on Pennsylvania to Legalize Cannabis in 2026

Pittsburgh City Council Urges Pennsylvania Lawmakers and Governor to Legalize Marijuana This Year as Regional Cannabis Markets Expand and Federal Rescheduling Adds Momentum

Resolution Highlights Racial, Economic, and Fiscal Impacts of Continued Prohibition While Calling for Urgent Bipartisan Action on Adult-Use Cannabis

Local officials in Pennsylvania's second-largest city are pressing state lawmakers and Governor Josh Shapiro to act quickly on legalizing marijuana during the 2026 legislative session. On Tuesday, the Pittsburgh City Council passed a resolution emphasizing the social, economic, and criminal justice consequences of continued prohibition.

The resolution notes that despite legalization in neighboring states and federal steps—including former President Donald Trump's historic rescheduling order—Pennsylvania still treats cannabis possession as a criminal offense in many circumstances. Council members highlighted that this enforcement disproportionately impacts low-income residents and communities of color, leading to ongoing arrests, prosecutions, and incarceration.

Council Resolution Points to Regional Disparities and Lost Revenue as Motivation for Urgent Cannabis Legalization in Pennsylvania

According to the resolution, Pennsylvania is now surrounded by four of its five neighboring states—New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Maryland—that have legalized adult-use cannabis. The council argued that the state's inaction has created an uneven regional landscape, prompting residents to cross state lines to purchase legal cannabis and resulting in substantial lost tax revenue, job creation, and other economic opportunities.

City Council Resolution Calls for Comprehensive Reform Centered on Decriminalization, Social Equity, and Economic Opportunity for Small Businesses and Workers

Sponsored by Councilmember Barb Warwick, the resolution urges lawmakers to prioritize decriminalization, social equity, expungement of prior cannabis offenses, expanded patient and veteran access, and inclusive economic opportunities for small businesses and communities historically harmed by prohibition. The council emphasized that “meaningful cannabis reform” must address both social justice and fiscal concerns.

Advocacy Groups and Legislative Allies Push Governor and Senate to Act as House Democrats Reiterate Call for Adult-Use Legalization

A coalition led by the Marijuana Policy Project and including groups such as the ACLU of Pennsylvania, Doctors for Drug Policy Reform, Last Prisoner Project, and LEAP, sent a letter to Governor Shapiro urging him to convene legislative leaders and advance legalization this session. The letter cited repeated inclusion of cannabis reform in Shapiro's budget requests as evidence of both sound fiscal policy and public support.

House Democrats, including Rick Krajewski and Dan Frankel, who sponsored a state-run store legalization bill passed last year, also called on the Republican-controlled Senate to bring forward proposals and negotiate a path to enactment. House Speaker Joanna McClinton noted that legalization represents an achievable revenue source if legislators can muster the political will.

Federal Marijuana Rescheduling Could Provide Political Cover for GOP Lawmakers and Spur Action on Keystone State Cannabis Reform

Bipartisan supporters argue that President Trump's federal rescheduling of marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III could influence 2026 legislation, giving hesitant Republican senators political cover. Senate Republicans, however, remain divided on whether federal changes alone are sufficient to advance legalization this year.

Republican Candidates and Lawmakers Weigh Potential Revenue, Interstate Competition, and Equity Concerns as Pennsylvania Considers Cannabis Legalization

Leading GOP gubernatorial candidate Stacy Garrity declined to take a firm policy position on legalization but suggested that Pennsylvania's projected cannabis revenue may be overstated compared to neighboring states such as Ohio. Meanwhile, other Republican senators signaled interest in negotiating legalization legislation with equity provisions to ensure gubernatorial support.

Pittsburgh Council Resolution, Advocacy Pressure, and Regional Market Dynamics Highlight Urgency of Legalization Debate in Pennsylvania

With public polls consistently showing bipartisan support for adult-use cannabis, advocates and city officials are calling on Pennsylvania lawmakers to resolve long-standing inaction. The Pittsburgh City Council resolution frames legalization as a matter of social justice, fiscal responsibility, and regional competitiveness, emphasizing that meaningful reform in 2026 could provide economic opportunity, reduce criminal justice disparities, and align the state with its neighbors.