

Hawaii Senate Passes Pilot Program for Cannabis Expungements

Hawaii Senate Approves Cannabis Expungements Pilot Program

In a significant move towards addressing the collateral consequences of past drug policies, Hawaii's Senate passed a cannabis expungements bill on Tuesday, aiming to create a pilot program focused on clearing certain past offenses. The proposal, known as **HB 1595**, received overwhelming support with a vote of **24–1**, and is now set to return to the House for further consideration ahead of an approaching legislative deadline later this week.

Under the bill's current provisions, a single-county pilot program would be established, initially targeting non-conviction arrest records related to low-level cannabis offenses. While the original version of the legislation sought statewide automatic expungements for thousands of individuals, the scope has been scaled back to focus on Hawaii County, home to approximately 14 percent of the state's population.

Rep. David Tarnas, the bill's lead sponsor, emphasized the significance of the pilot program as a first step towards broader expungement efforts. He highlighted the potential lessons to be learned from the initiative's implementation, which could inform future statewide expansion and inclusion of conviction records.

The decision to limit the program's scope was influenced by budgetary considerations, with Attorney General Anne Lopez citing constraints on available funds. Despite the scaled-back approach, advocates view the pilot program as a crucial first step in addressing the barriers faced by individuals with past cannabis-related arrests.

As lawmakers navigate the legislative process, various groups and stakeholders have voiced support for the expungements bill. Advocacy organizations, including the ACLU of Hawaii and the Last Prisoner Project, have underscored the importance of removing barriers to employment, housing, and other aspects of community life posed by criminal records.

In addition to **the expungements bill**, the Senate deliberated on other cannabis-related measures, including proposals to expand decriminalization and establish a task force focused on expungements. These initiatives underscore ongoing efforts within Hawaii's legislature to enact comprehensive reforms addressing cannabis-related issues.

While a separate proposal to legalize cannabis in **Hawaii** stalled earlier this month, advocates remain hopeful for future progress. Despite past challenges, support for cannabis reform appears to be growing among lawmakers and the public, reflecting a broader shift towards more equitable drug policies.