

Hawaii Senate Rejects Bill to Decriminalize Cannabis Possession

The Hawaii Senate this week dealt a blow to cannabis reform advocates by rejecting a measure aimed at decriminalizing possession of the plant.

Defeat in the Senate

SB 2487, which sought to increase the possession limit of cannabis and reduce associated fines, failed to gain sufficient support in the Senate, with a vote of 15-9 against the bill. This marks the second defeat of a cannabis-related measure in Hawaii's legislature this session, following the earlier failure of a bill to legalize recreational cannabis for adults.

Concerns Raised

Opponents of SB 2487 raised several concerns about the proposed legislation. Some expressed worries about increased youth access to cannabis, potential impacts on tourism, failure to address the illicit market, and heightened risks of automobile accidents. Senators cited public health and safety concerns, including the potency of THC in cannabis and the possibility of laced products, as reasons for opposing decriminalization without stringent regulations.

Support and Opposition

While some senators supported the move towards decriminalization, others advocated for more comprehensive legalization measures with robust safeguards. The bill faced opposition from entities such as the Attorney General's Office, Honolulu Police Department, and Honolulu Prosecutor's Office, which viewed SB 2487 as a step towards de facto legalization.

Current Law and Proposed Changes

Currently, Hawaii law decriminalizes possession of up to three grams of cannabis, with a fine of \$130 for violators. SB 2487 aimed to increase the possession limit to one ounce and reduce the fine to \$25. Proponents argued that heavy fines and criminal penalties for minor possession hinder individuals from accessing job opportunities and financial resources necessary for societal advancement.

Future Steps

Despite the setback on cannabis decriminalization, the Hawaii Senate unanimously approved Senate Bill 2706, which establishes a Clean Slate Expungement Task Force to draft legislation for clearing certain criminal records, including cannabis-related offenses. Additionally, House Bill 1595, focused on expunging marijuana-related records, is awaiting consideration by Gov. Josh Green.

While the defeat of SB 2487 represents a setback for cannabis reform in Hawaii, the state continues to grapple with the complex issues surrounding cannabis regulation and criminal justice. The passage of bills aimed at expungement signals a recognition of the need to address past injustices and move towards a fairer

legal system.

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