

# Breaking Barriers: The Quest for Recreational Cannabis in South Dakota

Despite a tumultuous history, advocates of legalizing recreational marijuana in South Dakota are once again making their voices heard, aiming to secure a spot on the state's November ballot.

## A Rocky Road to Reform

South Dakota's journey towards recreational marijuana legalization has been fraught with obstacles. In 2020, voters approved a medical marijuana initiative alongside a measure that sought to legalize recreational marijuana. However, the latter was invalidated by the South Dakota Supreme Court, citing a violation of the single-subject rule for constitutional amendments. Undeterred, advocates made another attempt in 2022, only to face defeat at the ballot box. Governor Kristi Noem has also been a vocal opponent of marijuana reform, seeking to delay the implementation of medical marijuana legalization.

## Renewed Efforts and Reasons for Support

Campaign Director Matthew Schweich highlights various reasons to support the initiative, including redirecting law enforcement resources, expanding access to individuals unable to obtain medical marijuana cards, and generating tax revenue and employment opportunities. Schweich emphasizes the comparative harmlessness of marijuana compared to alcohol, questioning the logic of penalizing cannabis use while alcohol remains legal.

## Opposition and Concerns

Groups such as Protecting South Dakota Kids vehemently oppose marijuana legalization, citing concerns about increased crime rates, suicide rates, traffic fatalities, workplace injuries, and mental health problems. However, proponents argue that regulated legalization would address such concerns by imposing strict possession limits and cultivation regulations.

## The Proposed Initiative

The ballot initiative aims to legalize recreational marijuana for adults aged 21 and older, with specified possession limits and cultivation allowances. Notably, the initiative does not include provisions for business licensing, taxation, or other regulatory frameworks, a conservative approach adopted in response to previous legal challenges.

## Looking Ahead

If successful, proponents plan to collaborate with the Legislature to enact implementation legislation addressing regulatory gaps. With federal proposals to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug, advocates hope for a more receptive environment among voters.

## Optimism Amidst Challenges

Despite past setbacks, advocates remain optimistic about the initiative's prospects, particularly in a year when voter turnout is expected to be high. With the issue of marijuana legalization gaining national attention and South Dakota voters likely to weigh in on other contentious issues, advocates believe the timing is ripe for a successful campaign.

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