

Biden Calls for Cannabis Reclassification, Denouncing 'Failed Approach'

The US Justice Department has formally moved to reclassify cannabis as a less dangerous substance, marking the country's most significant drug reform in over 50 years. President Joe Biden hailed the step as "an important move toward reversing longstanding inequities."

A Turnaround for Biden

This move represents a significant shift for President Biden, who three decades ago crafted a tough crime bill that has since become politically divisive. The reclassification could help Biden, a Democrat, shore up wavering support among younger voters in an election year.

Limited Scope of Legalization

Thursday's plan does not legalize marijuana outright for recreational use as is currently the law in 24 US states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-eight US states have also legalized marijuana for medicinal purposes. "Far too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana," Mr. Biden said on Thursday on X, formerly Twitter, in a departure from his usual reticence on cannabis policy. "I'm committed to righting those historic wrongs. You have my word."

Shifting Cannabis to Schedule III

The administration's proposal would shift cannabis from a Schedule I controlled substance, its most restrictive category, to Schedule III. The federal government would no longer view the drug alongside other dangerous and habit-forming substances like ecstasy, heroin, and LSD. Drugs in the Schedule III category are seen as having a low or moderate risk of abuse. They include anabolic steroids, ketamine, and testosterone.

Historical Context and Potential Impact

The federal government has retained its Schedule I classification for cannabis since Congress first enacted the Controlled Substances Act in 1970. Rescheduling would probably stimulate the legal cannabis industry by enabling easier access to traditional banking services and outside investments. The move could also provide a crucial boost to the president as he struggles to rally young and minority voters behind his re-election bid, particularly amid anger over the war in Gaza.

Biden's Evolving Stance on Cannabis

As a senator, Mr. Biden authored a 1994 crime bill that is often blamed for mass incarceration, disproportionately of black people, over drug offenses. As a candidate in 2020, Mr. Biden promised to decriminalize the use of cannabis and said he did not believe anybody should be behind bars on charges of simple possession or small-scale use. However, he continues to oppose full-scale legalization. His

administration has instead granted two rounds of mass pardons for people with federal cannabis possession convictions.

Addressing Overdose Epidemic

“No one should be in jail just for using or possessing marijuana,” he wrote on X on Thursday, nodding to his previous actions. “Right now, marijuana has a higher-level classification than fentanyl and methamphetamine – the two drugs driving America’s overdose epidemic,” he added. “That just doesn’t add up.”

Next Steps in the Reclassification Process

Thursday’s formal rule proposal to the federal register kicks off a lengthy approval process, beginning with a 60-day public comment period, before the change can take effect.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

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