

New Hampshire Senate Panel Alters House-Approved Cannabis Legalization Measure, Advancing It to Final Vote

A New Hampshire Senate panel has given its approval to a House-passed bill aiming to legalize marijuana, albeit with several amendments. The move sets the stage for a full Senate vote after committee members adopted changes proposed by Senate President Jeb Bradley.

Amendments to House-Approved Bill

The Senate panel, led by Bradley, made several alterations to the House-approved legislation, HB 1633. Among the key changes, Bradley's amendments aim to decrease the allowable possession limit of marijuana from four ounces to two for adults. Additionally, the proposed legalization of personal marijuana possession would now be delayed until after the licensed market is established.

Increased Penalties and Funding

Bradley's amendments also include provisions to increase penalties for selling marijuana to minors, with Senator Cindy Rosenwald expressing concerns over the harsher penalties compared to those for alcohol sales. Moreover, the amendments allocate \$250,000 in funding for the state Liquor Commission to hire consultants for rule development and mandate training on cannabis use disorder for industry licensees and employees.

Additional Changes and Floor Vote

Several other amendments address various aspects of the legalization framework, such as taxation, municipal elections, and regulatory oversight. These changes will be consolidated into a single amendment for consideration by the full Senate.

Next Steps

The bill, with or without the amendments, will return to the House for further consideration. However, potential modifications during this process could impact its chances of passage. Governor Chris Sununu, while expressing reservations about legalization, has signaled openness to signing a bill meeting certain conditions.

Concerns and Advocacy

Although advocates welcome progress toward legalization, they express concerns over certain amendments, particularly increased penalties for public consumption and taxation on medical cannabis products. Critics argue that these provisions could have disproportionate impacts and hinder access for patients.

Path Forward

With only months remaining in Governor Sununu's term, observers speculate on potential successors' stance on marijuana reform. While progress has been made in recent years, including the formation of a state commission on legalization, achieving consensus remains a challenge in the New Hampshire legislature.

As New Hampshire navigates the legalization debate, lawmakers continue to grapple with crafting comprehensive legislation that balances regulatory frameworks, taxation, and social equity considerations. The upcoming Senate vote and subsequent deliberations in the House will determine the fate of marijuana legalization in the Granite State.

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