

# Is Illinois About to Legalize It? Cannabis Bill Could be Introduced by Week's End

## Cannabis Business Legal News

By Darren Grady on May 1, 2019

Illinois legislators recently returned from a break and the legalization of cannabis in Illinois appears to be taking center stage. State Rep. Kelly Cassidy, an established cannabis advocate and one of the state's leaders in the push for legalization, is hoping that legislation will be introduced in full detail *this week*. A prior version of the bill, which was much less detailed than the version expected to be introduced in the coming days, was introduced in January and passed by the Senate Executive Committee last month.

The legislation has received support from new Governor J.B. Pritzker who ran for election with the legalization of adult use cannabis as one of his policy positions. Gov. Pritzker has stated that the reformation of the Illinois criminal justice system, one he has called "broken," is the most important factor in his decision to support legalization. The planned bill would address that factor directly. Should the bill be passed as written, not only would misdemeanor cannabis-related convictions be expunged, but people with cannabis-related convictions would be allowed to work in the cannabis industry. Further, the bill sets forth hiring goals aimed at promoting diversity in the industry. Further, Gov. Pritzker appears to be counting on Illinois to legalize cannabis as part of his proposed spending plan and budget.

It is also believed that the lawmakers involved in drafting the bill will provide detailed language that provides Illinois' regulatory agencies with specific guidance on how to implement what is expected to be a massive adult-use cannabis market. This is somewhat different than other states' initial legalization bills, some of which have focused only on the big picture and then relied on an eventual roll out of more detailed rules and regulations. This novel approach could help the bill speed through the legislative process.

While the support for legalization with state representatives and the governor is clearly present, it still remains to be seen if, or in what form, the bill will be passed into law. While a vote can be expected by the end of May, opposition is mounting in the form of a Virginia based nonprofit called Smart Approaches to Marijuana. This group has mounted opposition in other states, with varying levels of success, by securing the backing of various religious and law enforcement organizations and speaking out against legalization.

Despite this opposition, with general support from the state legislature, the governor, and the majority of Illinois residents, lawmakers do not appear worried and it is likely that cannabis will be legalized for adult use in Illinois in the near future in some way, shape, or form. Any individual or company already in the medical cannabis industry in Illinois should keep an eye on the planned introduction of the bill and its path through the House and Senate this month. Of particular interest to those already in the industry will be how currently licensed medical cannabis dispensaries and cultivators are treated with respect to applications and licenses for recreational cannabis.

Further, any company with employees (most if not all!) should start looking at and revising their policies, handbooks, and procedures on drug testing in anticipation of legalization of Illinois. Those companies ready to roll out new policies once adult-use cannabis opens up in Illinois will be well positioned for a smooth and mellow transition once this historic legislation is passed and enacted.

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