

Gov. Mike DeWine wants Ohio's new recreational marijuana law tweaked within next 30 days

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Gov. Mike DeWine is pushing state lawmakers to approve any changes to Ohio's [new voter-approved recreational marijuana law](#) within the next 30 days.

DeWine said he wants the law to be hammered out quickly, before elements of the law go into effect on Dec. 7, including lifting of criminal penalties for marijuana possession, to avoid public confusion that would result from shifting laws. The legislature is set to meet next week, and DeWine said he's been in touch with the leaders of the Ohio House and Senate, who both are Republicans.

"I think it's in the interest of everybody, if you want to grow marijuana, if you want to sell marijuana, if you consume marijuana or if you're even just a citizen who wants to protect your children, I think it's important that we get this done quickly," DeWine said. "And get it done thoughtfully and come up with a package, so at least everybody knows what the ground rules are when we start something new for the state of Ohio."

DeWine addressed Issue 2, as well as Issue 1, [which wrote sweeping protections for abortion into the state constitution](#) on Thursday, in his first public comments on either since voters approved them on Tuesday by 14 percentage points. DeWine, a Republican, opposed both.

DeWine was less specific about his thoughts about Issue 1, although he didn't rule out potential changes to the amendment. That would require another constitutional amendment — which Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman and other Republican lawmakers have vowed to pursue — with another statewide vote. Lawmakers will get their first crack on putting something on the ballot in March, which has an associated filing deadline in December.

DeWine made clear he doesn't view abortion as a settled issue, despite the vote. He said he thinks voters approved the measure because the well-financed, pro-Issue 1

campaign presented the public with a binary choice between the state's six-week abortion ban — which DeWine signed shortly after taking office in January 2019 — and Issue 1, which allows lawmakers to restrict abortion only after fetal viability, 22 to 24 weeks into pregnancy.

In the meantime, DeWine said he thinks the public will need to see how Issue 1 works in reality. The right to abortion, too, will go into effect in 30 days, [although its practical effects will be tied to the legal process](#), since repealing existing abortion laws would require someone to bring lawsuit, and for a judge to then strike them down.

“In a democracy, in a country like ours, things are always open for discussion,” said DeWine, who has described Issue 1's health and life of the mother exemptions as too broad. “As we move forward, things continue to be debated. And so I think the people of the state will want to take a look at, once this goes into effect, we'll have an opportunity to make a decision and judge how this is in fact. working. And we'll see how that evolves.”

DeWine's commented in greater detail on Issue 2. Technically, DeWine and lawmakers could delay Issue 2 or even repeal it completely without voter approval, since it was passed through what's called an initiated statute.

DeWine said there are “a lot of holes” in the language of Issue 2, but identified four general, safety-related areas he wants lawmakers to address: restrictions meant to prevent accidental ingestion, public use, driving while intoxicated and advertising, although Issue 2's language allows the governor's office to regulate advertising through the existing rulemaking process. Lawmakers also have expressed interest in hiking the 10% marijuana tax rate contained in issue 1, changing where its tax revenues go and lowering the cap on the amount of THC that marijuana products can contain.

Tom Haren, an attorney for the coalition of Ohio licensed medical marijuana businesses who backed Issue 2, addressed Issue 2 in general at a separate event in Thursday in Columbus.

He expressed frustration that the legislature knew the election was coming and it was likely to pass.

“We launched our campaign two years ago, and the legislature didn't give us the time of day,” he said, speaking at an after-election conference organized by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

Haren said that many of the desires DeWine expressed for recreational marijuana are allowed under Issue 2, which gives the Ohio Department of Commerce broad authority to make rules around the recreational program.

“The message I wanted to get across here is it’s going to be fine. Everything is going to be OK,” Haren said. “For 10 years, states have been regulating the sale of marijuana to adults. There’s a rulemaking process that will now kick into gear with the Department of Commerce, where they will promulgate a host of regulations.”

Like many Issue 2 critics, DeWine said he wants to avoid Ohio becoming like other states with legal marijuana, where the smell of marijuana can be difficult to avoid in more densely populated areas.

“The voters have said I think people should have a right to smoke marijuana, and that’s fine, but I think it’s important that people also have the right to not smell it,” DeWine said.