

Ohio House bill would allow municipalities to ban marijuana use, home grow

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Ohio municipalities could restrict the use of recreational marijuana and impose additional taxes under legislation introduced Tuesday by a House Republican.

House Bill 341, sponsored by Rep. Gary Click, R-Vickery, would make several changes to the marijuana law approved by voters in the Nov. 7 election. The proposal comes as Republican legislative leaders and Gov. Mike DeWine debate how to regulate a program that they hoped would never see the light of day.

The ballot measure, known as Issue 2, allows adults 21 and older to buy, grow and possess marijuana. Products would be taxed 10% on top of the state sales tax, with revenue going into four pots: a social equity and jobs program, municipalities with dispensaries, a substance abuse fund and administrative costs.

The law takes effect Dec. 7.

Issue 2 prohibits local governments from banning marijuana use or home grow, and they can't levy special taxes or fees on marijuana businesses. Click's bill removes those provisions altogether, which would empower municipalities to regulate cannabis within their boundaries. Lawmakers have grappled with similar debates over flavored tobacco, with some Republicans saying a patchwork of local bans is ineffective.

House Bill 341 also changes how revenue from the program would be doled out. The proposal maintains the social equity and community funds, but it also adds a second revenue stream for substance abuse and creates a fund for law enforcement training. About 19% of the money would go to those five pots, with 3% still reserved for administrative costs.

Several lawmakers have floated the idea of funneling marijuana revenue to police since Issue 2 passed.

"This is a discussion starter rather than the binary choice that was on the ballot," Click said. "It starts the conversation. Obviously, people want recreational marijuana. But they didn't get to dialogue in details. This is the

opportunity for citizens to express their voices in the committee process. I am open to amendments that reflect the will of the people."

Tom Haren, a spokesman for the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol, said they don't plan to comment on every piece of legislation that's introduced.

Dec. 7 deadline looming

It remains unclear whether lawmakers can reach a consensus on Issue 2 before it takes effect next week. DeWine and Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, want to enact some changes before then, but House Speaker Jason Stephens, R-Kitts Hill, hasn't expressed the same sense of urgency.

While it will be legal to use and grow marijuana after Dec. 7, sales in Ohio won't start until late next summer or fall because of the licensing process.

"This is creating an entire new industry," Stephens said Tuesday. "Whether it's market structure, you've got wholesale, retail, all of these types of factors in any company are extremely important, and we want to make sure we get those right so that we have a really strong system in Ohio. That is what I think the voters voted for."