

GOP lawmakers in House, Senate divided on allowing Ohioans to grow marijuana at home

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Ohio's Republican lawmakers are divided on whether residents should grow marijuana at home, setting up a dispute about a month after voters approved legal marijuana in the state.

On Monday, Republicans in the Ohio Senate introduced changes that would eliminate growing marijuana at home, increase taxes and change who gets the money from marijuana tax revenue. On Tuesday, Rep. Jamie Callender, R-Concord, introduced a different bill that would keep home grow intact.

Callender said he's not interested in a middle ground on that issue. "I think the middle ground is we do what the people voted and told us to do, which is six plants per person and 12 per household."

The GOP squabble comes after Ohio voters approved legalizing adult-use marijuana, 57-43%, last month. The law goes into effect Dec. 7.

Attempts to revise that legal marijuana program are playing out amid an internal fight over who will lead the Ohio House of Representatives next.

Among the proposed changes in Callender's House Bill 354:

- Adds guardrails on growing marijuana at home to prevent Ohioans from combining their plants into a "megafarm." The House would not change Issue 2's language allowing six marijuana plants per individual and 12 per household. Senate Republicans proposed eliminating home grow entirely.
- Adds a 10% tax on marijuana cultivators in addition to the 10% tax on marijuana sales. Callender said he's open to changes, the Senate has proposed a 15% tax on both.
- Distributes marijuana tax revenue with 36% to social equity programs run by counties, 36% to municipalities with marijuana dispensaries, 12.5% to the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline, 10% to county jails for mental health treatment, 3% to state departments to administer the marijuana program and 2.5% to a substance abuse and addiction fund.

- Apply Ohio's tobacco smoking bans to marijuana as well.
- Apply Ohio's restrictions on advertising tobacco to marijuana, too.

The House bill does not make any changes to Issue 2's THC limits. Under the voter-approved law, regulators must set a maximum amount of THC allowed in products, and that number must be at least 35% for plant material and 90% for extracts. Senators want to reduce that to 25% for plants and 50% for extracts.

On Wednesday, lawmakers will review the House's proposal in committee, but Callender doesn't expect a vote this week. "I think we can move it fairly quickly. I don't know that we can get it out (of the House) mathematically this week."

House Speaker Jason Stephens, R-Kitts Hill, said little about the future of marijuana legalization in Ohio.

"Rep. Callender introduced the bill earlier today and we will have discussions on that," said Stephens, declining to say where he stood on Issue 2's implementation. "There are a lot of different ideas that are going on about it and we'll continue the discussion."

Callender and Casey Weinstein, D-Hudson, had been working on a proposal like the one introduced Tuesday to tweak, rather than overhaul Ohio's new legal marijuana market. Weinstein called the Senate GOP's ideas "a purposeful kill shot" to Issue 2.

Meanwhile, the Senate is set to vote on its marijuana program overhaul as soon as Wednesday. Can the sides reach a compromise?

"The Senate's not really into conceding. That doesn't seem to be their M.O.," Callender said. "But I've talked to a number of senators who are thoughtful on the issue and considering it. And I think, like in the House, there's a wide range of opinions in the Senate."