2022 Cannabis Policy Reform Legislation

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Because less than half of U.S. states allow citizen-initiated ballot measures, in most states, the only way to reform cannabis laws is via the state’s legislature. With polls showing that 68% of Americans support making cannabis use legal and around 90% support allowing medical cannabis, lawmakers are finally starting to get the message that constituents want them to act on sensible and humane cannabis policies.

Yet, legislatures still lag far behind the public. Only 18 states have legalized cannabis for adults, and only six of those laws have been enacted by state legislatures (in a seventh state, New Jersey, the legislature itself referred the issue to voters). Meanwhile, 13 states are even further behind the times — lacking even a medical cannabis law. And 19 states continue to jail their residents for even simple possession of cannabis.

So far, one medical cannabis law has made it past the finish line this year: On February 2, 2022, Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves (R) signed into law SB 2095, sponsored by Sen. Kevin Blackwell, to restore voters’ will by creating a medical cannabis program. (The court had thrown out a voter-enacted medical cannabis law, along with the state’s entire voter initiative process.)

Meanwhile, the Maryland Legislature referred a simple state constitutional amendment to voters that will appear on the November ballot. The legislature also enacted companion legislation that will set up first steps toward legalization if voters approve the simple constitutional amendment.

Dozens of other bills are pending to advance sensible and compassionate state cannabis policies, while dozens more have died.

Here is a list of states where bills were considered in 2022 to legalize cannabis for adults, to decriminalize cannabis (i.e., by issuing a fine-only ticket for simple possession), or to legalize medical cannabis.