



## 2020 Marijuana Policy Reform Legislation

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This year, dozens of cannabis policy reform bills were introduced in state legislatures across the country, and several major reforms appeared poised for passage as of early March. However, the coronavirus derailed most of the bills that had not already passed.

The below lists states where bills were introduced to adopt new laws to legalize marijuana for adults, to adopt effective medical marijuana laws, or to replace possible jail time with fines for marijuana possession. Click on the state names below to learn more about efforts in your state and to take action in support of marijuana policy reform.

Of particular note:

- [Virginia's](#) legislature passed — and on May 21, 2020 Gov. Ralph Northam signed — a bill to decriminalize up to an ounce of marijuana, imposing a \$25 fine instead of possible jail time.
- In [Vermont](#), the Senate and House passed S. 54, a bill to legalize and regulate marijuana sales (possession and cultivation were already legal). Gov. Phil Scott allowed the bill to become law without his signature on October 7. The legislature and governor also enacted a companion expungement bill, S. 234.
- In [New York](#), for the second year in a row, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) proposed including legalization in the state's budget. However, the budget ultimately did not include it. The governor has said the state is “ripe” for legalization in 2021.
- [Connecticut's](#) governor sponsored a legalization bill for the first time in 2020. However, the legislative session was also disrupted by virus-related precautions and has adjourned. With legislative pick-ups and increasing pressure from other states, prospects in 2021 look promising.
- [Alabama's](#) Senate and [Kentucky's](#) House of Representatives both approved medical cannabis bills, but both were derailed by the virus until 2021.

Meanwhile, voters themselves [approved every cannabis-related ballot measure on the ballot in November 2020](#). Voters in Arizona, New Jersey, Montana, and South Dakota legalized cannabis for adults 21 and older, and Mississippi and South Dakota voters legalized medical cannabis.

[However, only 23 states allow citizen-initiated ballot initiatives](#), meaning in most states the only way to reform marijuana laws is via the legislature. With polls showing that [68% of Americans support making marijuana use legal](#) and around [90% support allowing medical marijuana](#), lawmakers are increasingly getting the message that constituents want them to act on sensible and humane marijuana policies.

In times of this pandemic, it is all the more apparent that finite government resources shouldn't be

wasted on cannabis prohibition. And states could use the economic growth and tax revenue that come with marijuana legalization in these challenging times.

## Marijuana Legalization Legislation

States with bills to legalize — and in most cases regulate — marijuana for adults: **23 and the U.S. Virgin Islands**

- **Arizona** (HB 2657; the legislature adjourned sine die; however, voters legalized cannabis on November 3, 2020, with 60% voting for Prop. 207)
- **Connecticut** (Governor's Bill No. 16, SB 6, and HB 5130; the legislature has adjourned)
- **Delaware** (HB 110; the House Revenue and Finance Committee advanced the bill in an 8-3 vote on June 5, 2019; the legislature took a lengthy break in the spring due to coronavirus and adjourned on June 30)
- **Florida** (S 1860 and H1389; the legislature adjourned and both bills are dead)
- **Georgia** (HB 1150; the legislature took a lengthy break in the spring due to coronavirus and adjourned on June 26)
- **Hawaii** (HB 1515, HB 1581, HB 708, SB 606, SB 686, and SB 702; the legislature took a lengthy break in the spring due to coronavirus and reconvened on June 22)
- **Iowa** (SF 469 and HF 2208; the legislature adjourned on June 14)
- **Kentucky** (HB 148 and SB 105; the legislature has largely suspended session but returned briefly for one or two days to focus on the budget before adjourning on April 15)
- **Louisiana** (HB 626 and HB 769 would regulate sales, but do not seem to remove criminal penalties; HB 646 would remove penalties for marijuana if the legislature adopts a taxed and regulated system; HB 546 would put a legalization question on the 2020 ballot; HB 346 would authorize local elections on whether to legalize marijuana; the legislature adjourned on June 1, and a special session ended on June 30)
- **Maryland** (HB 1400; the General Assembly adjourned three weeks early on March 18)
- **Minnesota** (HF 4632, HF 2285, HF 265, HF 465, SF 2840, SF 619, and HF 420; HF 265 and HF 465 propose a constitutional amendment that would go to voters in 2020; the Senate bills were voted down in committee in a 6-3 vote; the legislature has adjourned its 2020 session, and all of the bills are dead)
- **Mississippi** (SB 2497; the legislature adjourned on July 12)
- **Missouri** (HB 1978 and HB 2496; the legislature adjourned without the bill advancing)
- **New Hampshire** (HB 1648, HB 1663, and HB 481; on February 20, the House approved HB 1648 in a 236-112 vote; HB 1648 would have legalized possession and cultivation, but not sales; after a long recess, the legislative session reconvened on June 11; the Senate adjourned without taking up the bill)
- **New Jersey** (A.21 and S.21 are twin bills to implement the voter-approved legalization and regulation of cannabis. S.2535 and A.1897 would legalize personal possession. On June 16, 2020, the Assembly approved A.1897 63-10 when it was a decriminalization bill. In November, S. 2535 and A.1897 were amended to mirror one another and to instead legalize simple possession and reduce other penalties. A.1897 passed the Senate as a legal possession bill on November 16, 2020. A.21 has passed out of one committee, and S.21 has passed out of two committees as of November 20, 2020.)
- **New Mexico** (HB 160 and SB 115; the Senate Public Affairs advanced SB 115 in a 4-3 vote; however, it was voted down 6-4 in Senate Judiciary; the legislature has adjourned for the year)

- **[New York](#)** (A. 1617, A. 9509, S. 1527, and S. 7509; much of the legislative session was suspended; it resumed on May 26 but has since adjourned without taking up the bills)
- **[Ohio](#)** (HB 634 and HB 642; the legislature began meeting in May; Ohio has a year-round legislative session)
- **[Pennsylvania](#)** (HB 50, HB 1899, SB 527, SB 350, and HB 2050; the legislature is allowing lawmakers to choose to vote remotely)
- **[Rhode Island](#)** (H 7171; the legislature returned to the State House on June 15; the legislature was suspended for much of the session, but it reconvened in mid-July and is currently in recess)
- **[Tennessee](#)** (HB 2389, SB 1849; HB 235 and SB 256 would legalize under an ounce of marijuana, without legalizing sales or cultivation; HB 1610 and SB 1898 would legalize marijuana possession statewide and allow local initiatives to legalize and regulate it; the legislature reconvened June 1 and adjourned on June 18)
- **[Virginia](#)** (HB 269, HB 87, and HB 1507; would have legalized simple possession of marijuana without legalizing sales or cultivation. While the legalization bills did not advance out of committee before the legislature adjourned on March 12, the legislature included a study of legalization in a decriminalization bill that passed. A special session occurred in the late summer and early fall, but legalization was not taken up despite calls from the Legislative Black Caucus for action on the issue.)
- **[West Virginia](#)** (HB 2331, HB 2376, HB 3129, HB 4195, and HB 4625; these bills did not advance before the legislature adjourned on March 7)
- **[Wisconsin](#)** (SB377, AB 220, and AB 930; the legislature has adjourned)
- **[U.S. Virgin Islands](#)** (19-0061)

In Vermont, the legislature legalized possession and cultivation in 2018. This year, the legislature passed — and Gov. Phil Scott did not veto — a bill to allow and regulate cannabis cultivation and sales.

In addition, the **[New Jersey](#)** Legislature placed legalization on the November 2020 ballot, which voters overwhelmingly passed. Voters also approved citizen initiatives to legalize and regulate cannabis in **[Arizona](#)**, **[Montana](#)**, and **[South Dakota](#)**. Other campaigns were also in the works when coronavirus derailed signature drives.

**[Including the five new laws, 15 states](#)** have passed laws to legalize and regulate marijuana similarly to alcohol: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, and Washington. All but two—Illinois and Vermont—were by ballot initiative.

## **Bills to Remove Possible Jail Time — Often Imposing a Fine — for Simple Possession (“Decriminalization”)**

States with decriminalization bills: **14**

- **[Alabama](#)** (SB 267; the legislature was on hiatus due to the coronavirus for most of March and April and adjourned on May 18 without taking up the bill)
- **[Florida](#)** (S 0242; the legislature adjourned, and the bill is dead)
- **[Georgia](#)** (SB 513; the legislature took a lengthy break in the spring due to coronavirus and adjourned on June 26)

- [Indiana](#) (SB 114; the legislature adjourned on March 11, and the bill is dead)
- [Iowa](#) (HF 93; the legislature adjourned, and the bill is dead)
- [Kentucky](#) (HB 221; the legislature suspended most of its session and adjourned on April 15)
- [Louisiana](#) (HB 49; the legislature adjourned on June 1; a special session ended on June 30)
- [New Jersey](#) (S.2101, S.312, S.2535, and A.1897; on June 18, the Assembly passed a decriminalization bill in a 63-10 vote with five abstentions, sending it to the Senate for consideration; a more comprehensive bill — S.2535 — was also proposed in the Senate; S.2535 and A.1897 were amended to mirror one another and to legalize personal-use cannabis in November, and A.1897 passed the Senate as a legal possession bill on November 16, 2020.)
- [Oklahoma](#) (HB 2614; the legislature has adjourned for the year)
- [South Carolina](#) (H 3276, H 4313, and H 4803; the legislature has adjourned, though it is meeting for one or more brief, narrowly focused sessions)
- [Tennessee](#) (HB 235 and SB 256; the legislature reconvened June 1 and adjourned on June 18)
- [Virginia](#) (HB 265, HB 301, HB 481, and SB 2; SB 2 passed the Senate 27-13 on February 11 and the House amended and then passed the bill 63-25 on February 26. A reconciled bill was presented to Gov. Northam, who requested several amendments. On April 22, the legislature rejected two of the amendments. The governor signed the final version of the legislation on May 21, 2020.)
- [West Virginia](#) (SB 100; this bill did not advance before the legislature adjourned on March 7)
- [Wisconsin](#) (AB 1004; the legislature has adjourned)

With the addition of Virginia’s new law and the four new legalization laws, [31 states](#) and Washington, D.C. have decriminalized or legalized marijuana possession.

## Effective Medical Marijuana Bills

States with bills to create comprehensive medical cannabis programs: **12**

- [Alabama](#) (SB 165; on March 13, the Alabama Senate approved the bill in a 22-11 vote; the House did not get an opportunity to vote on the bill due to the coronavirus; the legislature has adjourned)
- [Georgia](#) (SB 232; the legislature took a lengthy break in the spring due to coronavirus and adjourned on June 26)
- [Indiana](#) (HB 1041, HB 1163, and HB 1216; the legislature adjourned on March 11, and the bills are dead)
- [Iowa](#) (SF 104 and HF 221; the legislature adjourned on June 14)
- [Kansas](#) (HB 2163, SB 113, HB 2303, SB 195, HB 2740, HB 2742, HB 2017, and HB 2413; the legislature adjourned, and the bills died in committee)
- [Kentucky](#) (HB 136, SB 107; the House of Representatives approved HB 136 in a 65-30 vote on February 20; the Senate did not have an opportunity to vote on the bill because the legislature suspended most of its session and then adjourned on April 15)
- [Mississippi](#) (SB 2498, HB 1213, HB 1411, and HC 39; the bills died in committee; however, HC 39 was approved — it placed a competing, more restrictive medical cannabis initiative on the ballot. Voters preferred the less restrictive citizen initiative overwhelmingly.)
- [Nebraska](#) (LB 110; passed the unicameral legislature’s Judiciary Committee on May 10, 2019 in a 5-1 vote, with one absent and one present but not voting; the bill carried over to 2020, but the legislature adjourned without taking up the bill)

- [North Carolina](#) (HB 401 and H 1143; the legislature is meeting with measures in place to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus; the legislative session ended on June 30)
- [South Carolina](#) (H. 3660, S. 366, H. 3081, and H. 3272; S. 366 passed a Senate Medical Affairs subcommittee and is in the full committee; committee meetings in both chambers were scheduled for mid-March but were cancelled or postponed due to the coronavirus; the legislature has adjourned, though it is meeting for one or more brief, narrowly focused special sessions)
- [Tennessee](#) (SB 486, HB 637, HB 2741, and SB 2441; the legislature adjourned on June 18)
- [Wisconsin](#) (AB 750, SB 683, and SB 377; SB 377 would allow both medical and adult-use cannabis; the legislature has adjourned)

In addition to states where legislatures are considering medical marijuana, voters overwhelmingly approved medical cannabis measures in [South Dakota](#) and [Mississippi](#) on November 3, 2020.

[Thirty-six states](#), D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have effective medical marijuana laws. Three additional states — Georgia, Iowa, and Texas — have more limited laws that allow regulated access to low-THC medical cannabis preparations.

## Don't see your state?

If you live in a state that still prohibits marijuana and no lawmakers have taken the lead to change that, send your state legislators a note to ask them to stand up for humane and sensible marijuana policies. Take a few moments to email them in support of [medical marijuana](#), [decriminalization](#), or [legalizing and regulating marijuana](#). And wherever you live, please [ask your member of Congress and U.S. senators](#) to support legislation to protect individuals who are complying with state medical marijuana and legalization laws.