

O-high-o: Ohio Voters vote to Legalize Recreational Cannabis

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On Nov. 7, Ohio voters solidly endorsed a measure to legalize recreational cannabis, marking a pivotal moment in the nation's evolving perspective on cannabis. This decisive vote makes Ohio the 24th state to embrace adult-use recreational cannabis, showcasing an expanding acceptance across more politically conservative states. Now, over half of all Americans reside in states that sanction recreational cannabis use for those aged 21 and above.

Diving into the details, the newly-approved initiative permits the legal possession of up to 2.5 ounces of cannabis for adults. Additionally, Ohioans can possess up to 15 grams of concentrates. The law also permits the home cultivation of 6 plants individually, with households collectively allowed to possess up to a dozen.

Financially, the law levies a 10% sales tax on cannabis transactions.

The proceeds are earmarked for notable causes: 36% will bolster social equity and job initiatives, another 36% will flow into communities hosting cannabis businesses, 25% will enhance education and substance abuse programs, and the remaining 3% will cover the costs of the new regulatory framework.

For regulation, the Buckeye State is set to establish a Division of Cannabis Control under its Department of Commerce, a body vested with the power to license and regulate the budding industry. A notable provision gives a leg up to existing medical cannabis ventures, guaranteeing them a swift entry into the recreational domain.

However, the law does permit local jurisdictions to exercise their discretion in prohibiting new recreational enterprises, though they can't touch established medical entities that wish to expand. Employers retain the right to enforce zero-tolerance policies for workplace consumption.

On the topic of social equity, while some advocates express concerns over the omission of explicit automatic expungement provisions, the regulation mandates a thorough investigation into criminal justice reforms, including expungements. Additionally, social equity applicants are given advantages in the application process.

The implications of Ohio's decision are substantial. With its significant population, Ohio is poised to become a major player in the recreational market, which could exert pressure on neighboring states, including Pennsylvania, to reevaluate their cannabis policies as their residents might flock to Ohio, contributing their tax dollars there. Moreover, the financial boon expected to accrue from legal cannabis—about \$300 million annually, according to an Ohio State University study—presents an alluring fiscal prospect for the state.

The wheels are turning as we look ahead to the cannabis sales expected by late 2024, provided the legislative process doesn't introduce delays. Advocates and stakeholders will be keenly watching as Ohio navigates the intricacies of legislating and launching a recreational cannabis market that promises both growth and challenge.

With Ohio's election decision, the state joins Pennsylvania border states New Jersey, New York, Delaware, and Maryland in legalizing cannabis.

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