

Georgia Gov. Deal signs medical marijuana bill into law

April 16 2015, by Bill Hendrick



Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal, center, signs a medical marijuana bill into law as the bill's sponsor, Rep. Allen Peake, R-Macon, left, watches on along with Sen. Butch Miller, R-Gainesville, right, during a ceremony at the Statehouse, Thursday, April 16, 2015, in Atlanta. The bill makes Georgia the 38th state to have one and legalizes possession of cannabis oil for treatment of certain medical conditions. (AP Photo/David Goldman)

An emotional Gov. Nathan Deal signed legislation Thursday that

immediately legalizes the use of medical marijuana in Georgia to treat eight serious medical conditions.

Sponsored by state Rep. Allen Peake, a Republican from Macon, the new law makes it legal for people to possess up to 20 ounces of fluid cannabis oil. The cannabis oil can contain no more than 5 percent tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive agent.

With the stroke of a pen, Georgia became the 36th state, plus Washington, D.C., to legalize [marijuana](#) extracts to treat illnesses. Georgia's law makes cannabis oil legal to treat people with epilepsy and other seizure disorders, Lou Gehrig's Disease, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, mitochondrial disease, Parkinson's disease and [sickle cell anemia](#).

"For the families enduring separation and patients suffering pain, the wait is finally over," said Deal, his voice cracking. "Now, Georgia children and their families may return home, while continuing to receive much-needed care. Patients such as Haleigh Cox, for whom this bill is named, and others suffering from debilitating conditions can now receive the treatment they need, in the place where they belong—Georgia."

He hugged Haleigh, 5, who has intractable epilepsy, and her mother, Janea Cox, who have been living in Colorado for months while husband Brian, a Johns Creek firefighter, stayed in Georgia.

While possession of marijuana is illegal under federal law, the U.S. Justice Department has said it will not stand in the way of states that want to legalize marijuana as long as effective controls are in place. Joseph Moses, a special agent in Atlanta for the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, said the DEA will "hold to those guidelines" but added that marijuana remains illegal under federal law.

Asked if people who need cannabis oil will run the risk of arrest in states between Georgia and Colorado or from federal Transportation Security Administration agents at airports, he said he couldn't "get into the hypotheticals."

That's what scares people like Mike Hopkins, 53, of Covington, who came home from Colorado for the ceremony. He said he's not willing to take a chance that his daughter, Michala, might not be able to be treated with cannabis oil. Two of his children have died.

He said the 17-year-old has been "helped tremendously" by the extract but "we're going to stay in Colorado for a while. We just can't take the chance."

Peake and other advocates contend the state should legalize and regulate the in-state cultivation of cannabis oil to remove any risk.

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