

California governor OKs medical marijuana regulations

October 10 2015, by Lisa Leff



In Aug. 19, 2015 file photo, Canna Care employee John Hough waters young marijuana plants at the medical marijuana dispensary in Sacramento, Calif. Gov. Jerry Brown signed a trio of bills, Friday, Oct. 9, 2015, that created the first statewide licensing and operating rules for pot growers, manufacturers of cannabis-infused products and retail weed outlets. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

A trio of bills aimed at bringing order and oversight to California's medical marijuana industry nearly 20 years after the state led the nation in legalizing pot for medical use won Gov. Jerry Brown's signature, his office said Friday.

The first statewide licensing and operating rules for pot growers, manufacturers of cannabis-infused products and retail weed stores comes as multiple groups try to qualify voter initiatives in 2016 that would allow adults to use marijuana recreationally.

Even before Brown approved the package of new rules, initiative sponsors had started rewriting their proposed measures to incorporate many of its elements in hopes of not alienating the governor ahead of next year's election.

"My hope is this will be viewed as a starting point, a solid foundation on which to build from," Assemblyman Ron Bonta, D-Oakland, the lead author of one of the bills, said Friday. "Whatever happens with recreational use, there needs to be proper regulation. This is a very strong contribution from the Legislature about what those regulations should look like."

The Democratic governor's endorsement of the 70-page Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act hammered out by lawmakers in the closing hours of the legislative session was expected because his office crafted many of the exhaustive details.

"This new structure will make sure patients have access to medical marijuana, while ensuring a robust tracking system," Brown said in a signing statement. "This sends a clear signal to our federal counterparts that California is implementing robust controls not only on paper, but in practice."

The package seeks to manage medical marijuana by requiring individuals or companies engaged in any aspect of the industry to obtain at least one of 17 different licenses. It restricts the number of licenses one company could have.

The legislation includes separate licenses for indoor and outdoor cultivation, transportation, product testing, distribution and dispensaries of different sizes. It also charges various state agencies to develop guidelines for packaging, potency, pesticide use and advertising.

"Today, the Wild West era of medical cannabis came to an end, and a new era of responsible regulation has begun," said United Food and Commercial Workers Western States Council Executive Director Jim Araby, whose union lobbied for employment standards in the bills.

In addition, the bills preserve the right of individuals to grow small amounts of medical marijuana for personal use and allows local governments to ban or tax marijuana-related businesses. Another provision commissions the University of California to study how marijuana affects driving and to recommend appropriate impaired-driver standards.

"This package proves that, for the first time, Californians can work collaboratively to develop and produce comprehensive medical marijuana regulation," said California Police Chiefs Association President David Bejarano, whose organization opposed previous efforts to regulate medical marijuana at the state level on the theory that to do so would amount to an endorsement that pot has proven benefits.

The state is expected to start issuing licenses to medical marijuana suppliers and distributors in 2018. But Brown said state agencies given responsibility for enforcing the new laws would immediately start working on fleshing out procedures left unaddressed in the bills.

The legislation includes: Bonta's AB266, which sets up a medical marijuana bureau; AB243 by Assemblyman Jim Wood, D-Healdsburg, which allows the state to issue licenses to pay for oversight; and SB643 by Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg, which cracks down on clinics that specialize in issuing [medical marijuana](#) licenses for people without valid health needs.

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