

Ohio becomes latest state to legalize medical marijuana

June 9 2016, by Ann Sanner



In this April 6, 2016, file photo, Ohio Gov. John Kasich delivers an annual State of the State address at the Peoples Bank Theatre in Marietta, Ohio. Kasich has signed legislation legalizing medical marijuana in Ohio, though patients shouldn't expect to get it from dispensaries here anytime soon. The legislation signed Wednesday, June 8, 2016, allows patients to use marijuana in vapor form for certain chronic health conditions, while barring patients from smoking marijuana or growing it at home. (AP Photo/Tony Dejak, File)

Republican Gov. John Kasich signed a bill Wednesday legalizing medical marijuana in Ohio, though patients shouldn't expect to get it from dispensaries here anytime soon.

The bill lays out a number of steps that must happen first to set up the state's [medical marijuana](#) program, which is expected to be fully operational in about two years. The law would allow patients to use marijuana in vapor form for certain [chronic health conditions](#), but bar them from smoking it or growing it at home.

Kasich's signature made Ohio the 25th state to legalize a comprehensive medical marijuana program, according to a count by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Some questions and answers about the legislation:

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WHAT CHANGES WOULD BE IN PLACE FIRST?

When the law takes effect in 90 days, cities and towns could move to ban dispensaries or limit the number of them. Licensed cultivators, processors, dispensaries and testing laboratories could not be within 500-feet of schools, churches, public libraries, playgrounds or parks. Employers could continue to enforce drug-testing policies and maintain drug-free workplaces. Banks that provide services to marijuana-related entities would be protected from criminal prosecution.

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HOW WILL FALL BALLOT PROPOSALS BE AFFECTED?

One group already has ended its effort to put a medical marijuana issue

on the November ballot after the passage of the bill. The Ohioans for Medical Marijuana campaign initially said the legislation would bolster its initiative. But the group, backed by the nationally active Marijuana Policy Project, later called the bill "a step forward," and ended its campaign. Several others were cleared to collect signatures for medical marijuana ballot proposals, but their initiatives have lacked steam. One such campaign, Legalize Ohio 2016, had trouble fundraising and put its effort on hold earlier this year.

WHO RECOMMENDS THE RULES FOR THE MEDICAL MARIJUANA PROGRAM?

A newly created Medical Marijuana Advisory Committee will help develop regulations and make recommendations. The governor and legislative leaders must appoint people to the 14-member panel no later than 30 days after the bill's effective date. Its members will represent employers, labor, local law enforcement, caregivers, patients, agriculture, people involved in [mental health treatment](#) and people involved in the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction. Others include a nurse, academic researcher, two practicing pharmacists and two practicing physicians. No more than six members can be of the same political party. The bill dissolves the committee after five years and 30 days.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR RULES TO BE ADOPTED?

No longer than one year after the bill's effective date. Rules for the licensing of cultivators must happen a few months earlier. The legislation specifies that the medical marijuana program is to be fully

operational within two years of the bill.

WHO WILL REGULATE THE PROGRAM?

The Ohio Department of Commerce, State Medical Board and Board of Pharmacy will all play a role. The Commerce Department will oversee licensing of marijuana cultivators, processors and testing labs. The Pharmacy Board will license dispensaries and register patients and their caregivers, and set up a hotline to take questions from patients and caregivers. The Medical Board would issue certificates to physicians seeking to recommend treatment with medical marijuana.

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