

North Dakota lawmakers want more time on medical pot rules

January 16 2017, by James Macpherson

Caught off-guard by voters in this highly conservative state approving medical marijuana, North Dakota lawmakers said Monday that more time is needed to implement the law.

A rare joint House and Senate meeting was held to consider a proposal to delay the law until the end of July. The so-called emergency measure is supported by both Republican and Democratic leaders, who said state health officials and [law enforcement](#) are scrambling to solve a number of issues, including allowable forms and potency of medical pot, and oversight of distributors.

"It's important to allow time to get this right," Democratic Senate Minority Leader Joan Heckaman told lawmakers.

The delay measure is expected to pass this week in both chambers, each of which must approve it by a two-thirds vote. It is unclear whether GOP Gov. Doug Burgum would sign it. A message left seeking comment was not immediately returned Monday.

A separate bill will be introduced next week that would suggest regulatory oversight, lawmakers said.

"This in no way is to try to stop the process," Republican Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner said. "Nobody is playing games with this. Everybody respects the will of the people."

The so-called North Dakota Compassionate Care Act won 65 percent voter approval in November, surprising even proponents. The law allows residents to possess up to 3 ounces of marijuana for medical purposes. It says those who qualify could obtain the drug from a state-licensed dispensary or grow a limited supply for personal use.

Anita Morgan of Fargo, who helped lead the effort to get the measure on the ballot, told lawmakers Monday that more than two dozen states already have comprehensive [medical marijuana](#) programs.

"We needn't reinvent the wheel," she said.

North Dakota's Health Department estimates medical marijuana will cost the state more than \$3.5 million a year and a small army of workers to regulate.

The Republican-led Legislature rejected a more stringent bipartisan measure in 2015 to legalize medical marijuana after state law enforcement and health officials said doing so would be a threat to public health and safety. Supporters of the measure at that time warned legislators that they would seek a voter initiative that likely would be less desirable to lawmakers.

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