

Missouri House votes to legalize medical marijuana

May 1 2018, by Blake Nelson

Missouri voters may have the option to legalize medical marijuana this November. Lawmakers are rushing to get there first.

The Missouri House voted Tuesday to legalize medical [marijuana](#) and Republican Rep. Jim Neely, the [bill](#)'s sponsor and a physician, argued that it was important that the Legislature set the rules for the industry.

"If we don't take action," Neely said, "voters of this state may very well take the decision out of the hands of the politicians and put it in the hands of the voters."

Lawmakers in both chambers have been making that point all year.

Several groups throughout the state are collecting signatures for ballot initiatives that would legalize, regulate and tax medical marijuana in a variety of ways. A group called Missourians for Patient Care will need more than 100,000 signatures in its effort to change state law; another group called Find the Cure needs more than 160,000 signatures for a vote on amending the state constitution.

All groups have until Sunday to submit the signatures needed to get their question on the midterm ballot.

The House bill, approved in a 112-44 vote, would allow anyone over 18 with a terminal disease to access smokeless marijuana. People with Alzheimer's, cancer, [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and several other

"debilitating medical conditions" would also be eligible.

Missouri would be the 30th state to legalize medical marijuana. Legislative researchers estimated that the state could bring in almost \$5 million a year by 2021 through taxing what could become a \$115 million-a-year industry.

Proponents said the change could help ease suffering. When the measure was first brought up, Republican Rep. Paul Curtman, from eastern Missouri, spoke about seeing men he had served with in the Marines kill themselves upon returning home from war.

Medical marijuana could have helped them, he said last week.

If the bill became law, the Department of Health and Senior Services would be able to expand the list of conditions that would qualify for [medical marijuana](#) as long as ten physicians asked for an addition.

That potential for expansion was one of several concerns brought up during debate. Opponents also warned about the potential for kids to access marijuana and the possibility that citizens carrying concealed weapons might have their judgment impaired by cannabis use.

Rep. J. Eggleston, Republican of northwestern Missouri, said the bill reminded him of Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein."

"I'm afraid we will end up making a monster we won't be able to control," he said.

The bill now heads to the Senate, which has less than three weeks to consider it before the end of session.

The bill is HB 1554

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