

Medical marijuana may be more accessible in New Jersey

July 2 2019

New Jersey expanded its medical marijuana program, including increasing the number of illnesses eligible for cannabis use, under a broad new law signed by the governor Tuesday.

Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, signed the Jake Honig Compassionate Use Medical Cannabis Act at a tavern in Freehold known for holding charitable fundraisers. He was with the parents and sister of the bill's namesake.

The law is named after a 7-year-old who died early last year after battling [brain cancer](#). His parents, Mike and Janet Honig, have fought for easier access to cannabis to ease pain during illnesses.

The measure makes a number of changes. It increases the limit that can be dispensed from 2 ounces to 3 ounces for 18 months after the law goes into effect, with a commission the measure establishes setting the limit afterward.

It boosts a patient's supply from 90 days to one year and allows for home delivery to patients.

The law lowers the threshold from debilitating illnesses to "qualifying" illnesses to make it easier for health care officials to prescribe the drug. The illnesses include seizure disorder, intractable skeletal muscular spasticity, post-traumatic stress disorder, glaucoma, cancer, as well as chronic pain and opioid-use disorder. Other illnesses could be added as

well.

It permits physician assistants and advanced practice nurses to authorize [medical cannabis](#). Previously, only doctors could prescribe it.

The law also sets up three new categories of licenses, including cultivators, manufacturers and dispensaries. Currently there is only a single of permit allowing so-called alternative treatment centers that cover all three categories.

The law calls for expanding the number of cultivators to 28. Currently the state is in the process of increasing the number of alternative treatment centers from six to 12.

The measure also sets up a five-member commission to regulate the drug, taking oversight of the program from the Health Department, and phases out the 6.625 percent sales tax over three years.

Before Murphy signed the legislation, Mike Honig told an emotional story about Jake enjoying waffle fries and a milkshake while on medical cannabis. Mike Honig said the morphine and opioids doctors had described had terrible side effects for Jake, including taking away his appetite and making him high. Medical cannabis, instead, helped his son feel like himself.

"Medical cannabis allowed Jake's personality to shine through cancer," Mike Honig said.

Murphy and the Democrat-led Legislature turned their attention to expanding [medical marijuana](#) after lawmakers failed in March to pass legalized recreational cannabis.

New Jersey's program began roughly a decade ago under Democratic

Gov. Jon Corzine. Republican Gov. Chris Christie, an ardent marijuana critic, implemented the program slowly over his two terms.

The program currently has over 49,000 patients, up from about 15,000 when Christie left office in early 2018.

Thirty-four states have medical marijuana programs, along with the District of Columbia, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

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