

German govt okays 'controlled' use of cannabis

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The German government approved a draft law Wednesday legalizing the purchase and possession of cannabis for recreational use, with the health minister pushing back against criticism of the controversial plans.

The legislation would allow adults to possess up to 25 grams (0.9 ounces) of cannabis and grow up to three plants for personal use.

People would also be allowed to join non-profit "cannabis clubs" of up to 500 members where the drug can be legally cultivated and purchased.

The bill still needs to be approved by lawmakers in the German parliament, who return from their summer break on September 4.

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach called the draft law "a turning point" in Germany's attitude towards cannabis.

The more relaxed approach would crack down on the black market and drug-related crime, ease the burden on law enforcement and allow for safer consumption of marijuana, he said at a Berlin press conference.

Minors will still be prohibited from using the drug, and the government will launch a campaign warning of the health risks for young people especially, he added.

"The concept we're presenting is one of controlled legalization," he told reporters.

"We want to limit consumption and make it safer," Lauterbach said.

The proposed legislation is a flagship project of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's center-left-led coalition and would leave Germany with one of the most liberal cannabis policies in Europe.

But the draft law is less ambitious than what was originally envisioned.

Plans to allow the widespread sale of cannabis in licensed stores were dropped in April after the European Commission raised concerns.

'Irresponsible'

The current proposal has nevertheless run into strong opposition from conservative politicians, doctors and [law enforcement](#) officials.

Bavaria's regional [health minister](#) Klaus Holetschek from the opposition, center-right CDU party called the plans "irresponsible". Examples from abroad had shown that liberalization does little to curb the [black market](#), he said.

The Professional Association of Pediatricians in Germany issued a joint statement with other youth health care associations "firmly" condemning the plans, saying they could encourage cannabis consumption among young people.

Police unions and judges have also criticized the legislation as too bureaucratic, fearing it will add more stress to the judicial system rather than relieving it.

Lauterbach said he welcomed the "controversial discussions" sparked by the plans, but said critics weren't putting forward any solutions.

Decriminalizing the drug while imposing a number of restrictions and spelling out the dangers of cannabis use "will work", Lauterbach insisted.

The government's public health campaign in particular will highlight the harmful impact of regular cannabis use on the still-developing brain of people under the age of 25, Lauterbach added, a topic he said was still "taboo" among parents and in schools.

The legislation also prohibits marijuana use within 200 meters (218 yards) of a school, youth organization, playground, sports grounds or "cannabis club".

If the bill goes through, the government aims to review the societal impact of the new legislation after four years.

A string of countries have already relaxed rules around cannabis use.

Uruguay became the first country in the world to legalize the production, distribution and consumption of marijuana in 2013.

In the United States, dozens of states including California have changed their laws in the past decade to allow people to light up.

Malta became the first European Union member to legalize recreational cannabis in 2021, while the Netherlands has tolerated the sale and use of cannabis in so-called coffee shops since the 1970s.

After studying the examples from other countries, Lauterbach said he was convinced the German plan in its current form was "the best attempt at cannabis legislation so far".

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