

This Is the Next State to Vote on Legalizing Marijuana

Ballot initiatives from two marijuana advocacy groups were approved by the Massachusetts attorney general on Wednesday, leaving it up to voters to decide whether pot smoking should be legal in the state.

The proposals, submitted to State Attorney General Maura Healey by the Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol and the Bay State Repeal, argue that legalizing the drug will make it easier to regulate its sale and prevent underage kids from accessing it.

Now, the backers must collect and file signatures from more than 64,000 voters by Dec. 2. The proposal would then be sent to the Legislature in May.

If officials do not enact the initiative at that time, then proponents must collect an additional 10,000 signatures by early July to bring it to the ballot box in the November 2016 election. If passed, the proposal would become a state statute.

In Massachusetts, 53 percent of voters told a Suffolk University/Boston Herald poll in February that they would favor legalizing marijuana with just 37 percent opposing.

Since 2012, similar initiatives have been passed by voters in Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and the District of Columbia.

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, a Democrat, has publicly condemned the use of marijuana, and in August passed an initiative banning the sale of synthetic marijuana products.

"I've seen too many lives ruined by starting to smoke weed and

then, eventually, going to other types of drugs,” Walsh, a recovering alcoholic, told the *Boston Globe* in May.

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, a Republican, has a similar stance, telling media he would oppose any such proposal.

The two Massachusetts proponents offer different proposals. The Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol proposes a percent excise tax, optional local taxes, and the creation of a new state group to regulate the drug.

The Bay State Repeal group proposes no additional taxes on the drug and argues it should be treated like other products sold to adults 21 years or older.

Pro-marijuana groups are launching similar campaigns in California, Nevada, Arizona, Michigan, Ohio and Maine in 2016.

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