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POLITICS

Seattle Becomes Largest U.S. City Decriminalize Psychedelics



Published 2 days ago on October 4, 2021

By **Ben Adlin** 



Seattle's City Council approved a resolution Monday to decriminalize noncommercial around a wide range of psychedelic substances, including the cultivation and sharing of psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, ibogaine and non-psychedelic-derived mescaline.



The landmark measure extends what is already Seattle city policy not to arrest or prosecute people for personal drug possession to further protect the cultivation and sharing of psychedelic plants and fungi for “religious, spiritual, healing, or personal growth practices.”

The legislation, passed by a unanimous vote, declares “that the investigation, arrest, and prosecution of anyone engaging in entheogen-related activities should be among the city’s lowest enforcement priorities” and requests the city’s police department “move toward the formal codification and adoption of that practice as departmental policy.”

Further, it expresses the council’s intent “to determine what changes would be necessary to protect from arrest or prosecution individuals who cultivate entheogens” and to make changes through a subsequent ordinance.

“These nonaddictive natural substances have real potential in clinical and therapeutic to make a really significant difference in people’s lives,” Councilmember Andrew Lew introduced the resolution, said before the vote. “This resolution really sets the stage first significant action in the state of Washington to move this policy forward.”

Seattle City Council 10/4/2021



“Entheogens, commonly known psychedelics, have been shown to benefit the well-being of individuals suffering from depression, severe anxiety, problematic substance use, post-traumatic stress, end-of-life anxiety, grief, and intergenerational trauma,” a [press release](#) from the councilman’s office said. “These and other physical and mental conditions are prevalent in many communities, which have been further demonstrated to be exacerbated by the COVID-19.”

The [resolution](#) was inspired in part by the City Council’s interest in reducing opioid-related deaths. Members in June formally asked a local task force studying the overdose crisis to [examine “public policy governing psychedelic medicines.”](#) Three months later, the task force [recommended the city decriminalize psychedelics](#) and consider removing criminal penalties around all drugs.

Meanwhile, members of the advocacy group Decrim Nature Seattle has spent more than 10 years lobbying the council to end penalties for cultivating and sharing psychedelics.]

the group submitted a draft ordinance to Lewis's office at the councilmember's request.

Decrim Nature Seattle (DNS) on Monday cheered the council's adoption of the resolution noting that Seattle is now the largest city in the country to have passed a decriminalization measure.

RESOLUTION PASSES!

9-0 UNANIMOUS VOTE!

THANK YOU EVERYONE AND THANK YOU

@SeattleCouncil @CMAAndrewJLewis! 100 100 😊 😊

**— Decrim Nature Seattle (@DecrimNatureSEA)
October 4, 2021**

"We're happy that our years of effort have paid off in making this a reality," said Kody Zalewski, DNS co-director and chair of policy and research, who thanked volunteers for making the victory possible. "This is only the very beginning of conducting a much larger effort to expand access to psychedelic medicine across Washington State, and codifying this resolution via citywide ordinance."

"Public opinion is changing, and many people are waking up to the fact that the War on Drugs leads to unnecessary incarceration, impedes access to profoundly effective medicine, and impinges on both religious freedom and personal liberty," Zalewski continued. "Social progress rarely happens through sweeping changes, but rather occurs from winning one battle at a time."

Tatiana Luz Quintana, the group's co-director and co-chair of education and outreach, stressed the importance of crafting local and state policy around psychedelics that guarantees equitable access for marginalized and oppressed groups, for example by including the right to grow and share psychedelic plants with other adults. Home cultivation of marijuana, by contrast, remains illegal in Washington State.

"While we have been following in the footsteps of cannabis decriminalization, we must move beyond the policies that fell short," Quintana said. "Creating equitable access to psychedelics is a critical step in our journey toward a more just and equitable society."

be at the forefront of how we continue to move this legislation forward.”

Lewis, the councilmember who introduced the resolution, [told Marijuana Moment in interview](#) that he believes “we’re in a position where, I think, we could see movement quickly from the state,” noting that he’s received very little blowback from constituents on his own proposal.

Last month, advocates announced a push [to put a measure on Washington’s 2022 ballot](#) that would decriminalize all drugs and invest state money in treatment and recovery.

During debate on the local measure on Monday, Councilmember Kshama Sawant questioned why the vehicle for the policy change was a resolution rather than a formal ordinance that would amend the city’s municipal code.

“We have not pushed for resolutions in place of ordinances when it is possible and reasonable and necessary from a political and moral standpoint for the council to have an ordinance passed to decriminalize psychedelics,” she said, adding that to decriminalize “in fact, rather than just in rhetoric, would require an ordinance, and it is the City Council, not the police department that has the authority to pass such an ordinance.”

The [version](#) of the Seattle resolution [passed](#) by the City Council includes some minor changes to an initial draft that was heard late last month by the council’s Public Safety and Home Services Committee. Specifically, it removes a provision that would have requested the Office of Intergovernmental Relations draft a decriminalization bill for legislators to consider at the state level. It also replaces a reference to “Native Americans” with “Indigenous people of the American Southwest.”

The latter change is in reference to the historical use of peyote, a cactus endemic to Mexico and parts of the American Southwest, which would not be decriminalized under the current resolution. The measure specifically excludes peyote from its definition of entheogen due to its vulnerable ecological status and unique cultural significance to certain Indigenous groups.

Peyote matures slowly and is currently categorized by conservationists as “vulnerable” due to an uptick in illicit harvesting. The cactus currently has no federal protection in the U.S., but in Mexico only Indigenous people can legally harvest it.

Groups such as the National Council of Native American Churches, which uses peyote in ceremonial contexts, have been urging activists and lawmakers not to include peyote on lists of

allowed plants and fungi. The group argued in a letter last year that the cactus should “preserved for utilization by and for Indigenous peoples.”

In Santa Cruz, one of the first U.S. cities to decriminalize psychedelic plants and fungi, City Council last month amended its policy to specifically exclude peyote as well as other plants that contain mescaline.

The change was supported by leaders of Decriminalize Santa Cruz (DSC), which helped pass the original measure. In a statement, the group apologized “for our lack of cultural sensitivity surrounding the Peyote cacti (*Lophophora williamsii*) and discounting Indigenous consultation in the process of decriminalizing entheogenic plants and fungi.”

How to reform drug laws while respecting Indigenous peoples’ centuries-old relationships with the threatened cactus has caused some controversy within the psychedelic advocacy community, however, and not all activists agree with the peyote carveout.

Carlos Plazola, the co-founder and chair of Decriminalize Nature National, opposed the change in Santa Cruz and spoke Monday during the Seattle City Council’s public comment period, arguing that prohibiting personal cultivation of peyote will put the cactus at high risk of extinction.

“For 100 years plus, we’ve had peyote criminalized, and it’s only led to its decline,” he said to the council, though he said he nevertheless supported the council’s passage of the resolution.

The Seattle measure notes that “entheogens have been recognized as sacred to human cultures around the world for centuries, and continue to be revered and utilized to this day by the venerable and sincere cultural and spiritual leaders and communities throughout the world and the United States.”

Lewis, for his part, said the issue of whether to include peyote is “certainly a conversation worth being willing to continue” if the policy is crafted into a formal city ordinance.

Like much of the rest of the country, Washington State is contemplating major changes in how it treats drug use. Earlier this year, state lawmakers considered legislation that would have removed all penalties for possession of relatively small, “personal use” amounts of drugs, but instead invested in treatment and recovery services. While that bill died in committee,

lawmakers from both parties acknowledged at the time that the state's drug control a was broken.

Shortly thereafter, the state Supreme Court overturned Washington's felony law against possession completely, sending lawmakers scrambling to replace the law. Ultimately approved a modest reform, reducing the state's felony charge for drug possession to a misdemeanor and earmarking more money for treatment. But the law's criminal penalties expire in 2023, an effort to encourage lawmakers to revisit the policy.

Jurisdictions across the country are increasingly removing or reducing penalties around possession and consumption, especially when it comes to psychedelics. Since Denver became the first U.S. city to decriminalize psilocybin mushrooms, a number of states and municipalities have made similar changes to dismantle the drug war.

Oregon voters passed a pair of initiatives last November to legalize psilocybin therapy and decriminalize possession of all drugs. On the local level, activists in Portland mounting a push to have local lawmakers extend psychedelics decriminalization to include cultivation, gifting and ceremonial use.

Washington, D.C. voters also approved a ballot measure last year to deprioritize enforcement of laws criminalizing psychedelics.

In California, activists last month were cleared to begin collecting signatures for a highly initiative to legalize psilocybin mushrooms. The cities of Oakland and Santa Cruz have enacted psychedelics decriminalization, and last year Oakland lawmakers approved a resolution that calls for the policy change to be adopted statewide and for local jurisdictions to be allowed to permit healing ceremonies where people could use psychedelics.

Meanwhile, Denver activists have set their eyes on broader psilocybin reform, with plans to allow noncommercial gifting and communal use of the substance.

Detroit currently stands to become one of the next major cities to decriminalize psychedelics with the reform proposal making the local ballot for this November.

Elsewhere in Michigan, the Ann Arbor City Council has already elected to make enforcement of laws prohibiting psychedelics like psilocybin, ayahuasca and DMT among the city's priorities. And last week the City Council in Grand Rapids advanced its own decriminalization.

resolution, but it fell far short of what activists had hoped. Rather than making any changes to city policy, it merely expresses support for future reform.

Massachusetts cities that have enacted the policy change include Northampton, Somerville and Cambridge. In July, state lawmakers heard testimony about a bill to create a task force charged with studying the implications of legalizing psychedelics like psilocybin and ayahuasca.

The governor of Connecticut recently signed legislation that includes language requiring the state to carry out a study into the therapeutic potential of psilocybin mushrooms.

Texas also recently enacted a bill to require the state study the medical benefits of psychedelics for military veterans.

A New York lawmaker introduced a bill in June that would require the state to establish an institute to similarly research the medical value of psychedelics.

The Maine House of Representatives passed a drug decriminalization bill this year, but it later died in the Senate.

At the federal level, congressional lawmakers in May filed the first-ever legislation to decriminalize possession of illicit substances.

In a setback for advocates, the U.S. House of Representatives recently voted against a bill from Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) that would have eased rules that current research into Schedule I drugs, but it picked up considerably more votes this round than the congresswoman first introduced it in 2019.

Provisions of separate, House-passed spending legislation identify a need to expand cannabis and psychedelics research, including into the potential therapeutic value of psychedelics for military veterans suffering from a host of mental health conditions.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) also recently announced funding for a study to determine whether psilocybin can help people quit smoking cigarettes.

Elon Musk Says People Should Be 'Open To Psychedelics' And Predicts The Next Generation Of Politicians Will Normalize The Substances



Elon Musk might have his eyes set on Mars, but he says people should also be open to exploring internally with psychedelics. The SpaceX founder also predicted that, as younger generations assume positions of power in government, there will be a greater societal embrace of the therapeutic potential of psychedelics. Musk was asked

about the ... Continue reading



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Ben Adlin



Ben Adlin is a Seattle-based writer and editor. He has covered cannabis as a journalist since 2011, most recently as a senior news editor for Leafly.

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Congressman Says He'll Bring The Psychedelics Reform Movement To Capitol Hill 'This Year'



Published 2 hours ago on October 6, 2021

By Kyle Jaeger 



A congressman said on Wednesday that he intends to help bring the psychedelics reform movement to Capitol Hill “this year.”

Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), a longstanding champion of marijuana reform in Congress, made the comments at a symposium on psychedelics policy that was hosted by Harvard Law School’s newly established research institute, the [Project on Psychedelics Law and Regulation \(POPLAR\)](#).

He touted moves by voters in his home state of Oregon to [legalize psilocybin for therapeutic use](#) and more broadly decriminalize possession of currently illicit drugs during last year’s

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Bipartisan Pennsylvania Lawmakers Team On Marijuana Legalization Bill As Push For Reform In The State Heats Up



Published 5 hours ago on October 6, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 



Pennsylvania is becoming something of a hotbed for marijuana legalization legislation, with Democratic state lawmaker on Tuesday announcing his intent to file a reform bill that he's working on with a Republican senator who announced his support for the policy change a earlier.

There are also two other Pennsylvania legalization proposals that have been separately announced—one of which was formally introduced late last month and the other still bein

drafted.

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VA Is 'Very Closely' Following Psychedelic Research For Veterans With PTSD, Official Tells Lawmakers



Published 24 hours ago on October 5, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is “very closely” following research into the potential therapeutic benefits of psychedelics like MDMA for military veterans, an official at a recent congressional hearing.

At the meeting before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee late last month, Rep. Colin Allred (D-TX) asked for a status update on research into the use of psychedelics for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans.

The meeting wasn’t focused on psychedelics; rather, it centered on veteran suicide prevention and innovative approaches to combat the issue. Allred said there were “pretty good results”

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