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# Lawmakers say no to bill legalizing psilocybin-assisted therapy in Maine

The Health and Human Services Committee voted 8-3 against legalizing medical use of the psychedelic compound contained in 'magic mushrooms,' even after the bill's sponsor offered to amend it to simply study the issue and possibly offer it as palliative care.

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State lawmakers quashed a proposal that would have allowed the use of psilocybin to treat depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Health and Human Services Committee voted 8-3 Tuesday against legalizing medical uses of the psychedelic compound even after the bill's sponsor, Sen. Donna Bailey, D-Saco, offered to amend the original 40-page bill to simply establish an advisory board to study the issue and possibly offer psilocybin as palliative care.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration designated psilocybin as a breakthrough treatment for drug-resistant depression in 2018 and for major depressive disorder in 2019. Psilocybin is the active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms, but also can come in pill form.

Rep. Michele Meyer, D-Eliot, who co-chairs the committee, suggested she couldn't support any compromise until the drug had full FDA approval. She also was sympathetic to concerns that the bill would essentially sanction recreational use, [an issue first raised](#) by Dr. Nirav Shah, the director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

"It's an important discussion," Meyer said of the treatment option. "This is a breakthrough therapy and it shows promise, but the science is not there yet."

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Advocates said they were disappointed in the decision. Michael Burman, a professor of psychology at the University of New England, said in an email that he understands the concerns of legislators, especially given that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency lists psilocybin and other psychedelics as Schedule I drugs, something he ascribed to historic biases rather than current science.

"I'm disappointed, but not surprised, by the outcome," Burman said. "Psychoactive drugs are a complex topic. ... However, in the case of psilocybin, society is changing,

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A Maine therapist with two patients benefiting from psychedelic drug-assisted therapy to treat PTSD and depression also expressed disappointment. She said the patients were not helped by traditional treatments. The Press Herald agreed not to name the therapist because she fears losing her license.

“I’m disappointed they wouldn’t even consider an advisory board to look into it deeper,” she said Tuesday.

## BILL BASED ON OREGON’S

The proposed bill was based on a similar one enacted by voters in Oregon, which became the first state to legalize psilocybin-assisted therapy in 2020.

It would have allow people to use psilocybin at designated treatment centers under certain conditions. The user must have a counseling session to set expectations before being dosed and would be supervised by two monitors during the hours-long session. The program also would have been overseen by a 19-member advisory panel, with licensing and rule-making being done by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Some U.S. cities also have moved to decriminalize psilocybin. Denver became the first city to decriminalize psilocybin mushrooms in 2019, followed by Oakland and Santa Cruz in California. Voters in Detroit voted to decriminalize mushrooms in November.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine are studying the use of psilocybin to help people quit smoking or drinking, relieve anxiety among cancer patients and treat depression.

Three people using psilocybin mushrooms as part of their therapy [shared their experiences](#) last month with the Maine Sunday Telegram, which agreed to not identify them because they feared criminal enforcement.

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A 43-year-old Portland man said psilocybin therapy helped him forgive himself and others. A middle-aged professional from central Maine said it helped him overcome self-loathing. And a 44-year-old veteran said it helped alleviate his PTSD. All three said traditional drugs did not work for them, dampened their feelings in general and had other side effects.

While several people testified in support of the bill, it was opposed by Shah, the Maine Chiefs of Police Association, the Maine Municipal Association and the Maine Medical Association.

In written testimony, Shah expressed concerns about several aspects of Maine’s bill, including limits placed on DHHS to regulate use of psilocybin and what he considered insufficient input from behavioral and public health experts into the

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facilities.”

## SHAH URGES AWAITING FDA OK

Although early studies are showing promising results, Shah urged lawmakers to wait until clinical guidelines are established and the FDA gives psilocybin full approval as a treatment.

“In summary, the Maine CDC and Department of Health and Human Services believe there should be much further scientific research and discussion about psilocybin before a structure is established for its administration and use in Maine,” he said in his testimony.

Rep. Kathy Javner of Chester, the lead Republican on the committee, said Tuesday that municipalities are still struggling with the state’s marijuana policies.

“We’re not ready,” she said.

Three Democrats with health credentials voted in support of the amended version of the bill to establish a study committee. They were Sen. Ned Claxton, D-Auburn, a retired physician and committee co-chair; Rep. Samuel Zager, D-Portland, a family physician; and Colleen Madigan, D-Waterville, a social worker.

Zager said the advisory group would ensure that Maine is ready to implement treatment plans when and if the FDA approves psilocybin and MDMA, or ecstasy, which has been shown to treat PTSD. He said similar efforts were undertaken with FDA-approved medications used to end someone’s life under the state’s death with dignity law.

“That sort of strategic planning could be useful,” he said.

C.J. Spotswood, a psychiatric nurse practitioner in Winthrop with 20 years’ experience, has been researching psychedelic drugs for five years. Spotswood said after the work session that he was disappointed that lawmakers did not want to continue the conversation. And he worried people would continue to use the drugs in unsafe settings instead of under the supervision of trained medical practitioners.

“Again, the people of Maine will suffer for not having (legal) access to life-changing substances,” he said in an email. “This will lead more to find the services elsewhere such as underground providers, or seek to use the substances without much supervision or oversight, leading to more potential complications.

“Maybe we need to move forward to a ballot initiative to make changes like Oregon did. Then the people can truly have their voice heard.”

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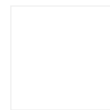
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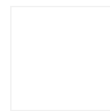
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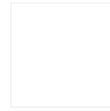
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