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Colorado Activists Pick One Of Several Psychedelics Reform Initiatives To Pursue For November Ballot

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Published 3 days ago on March 15, 2022 By **Kyle Jaeger**

POLITICS

SCIENCE & HEALTH



f Y Colorado activists have made a decision: of the four psychedelics reform ballot initiatives that they drafted and filed for the November ballot, they will proceed with a measure to legalize psilocybin, create licensed "healing centers" where people can use the psychedelic for therapeutic purposes and provide a pathway for record sealing for prior convictions.

The proposal would also eventually allow regulators to decide whether to legalize DMT, ibogaine and mescaline.

The New Approach PAC-backed campaign went into this election season with several options. Colorado officials have given tentative approval to the ballot language of four psychedelics reform measures that they submitted—all titled the Natural Medicine Health Act—but it was always the plan to pursue only one version. Now they've requested permission from the state to start signature gathering for Initiative 58.

The campaign conducted internal polls on the differing provisions between the proposals to help inform their decision, and evidently advocates are confident that the public will back the measure if it ultimately makes the ballot.

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Kevin Matthews, the campaign manager behind Denver's <u>historic 2019 vote to locally</u> <u>decriminalize psilocybin</u>, and Veronica Perez are the designated representatives of these measures.

Matthews told Marijuana Moment that the campaign "chose Initiative 58 because it is our most comprehensive policy and it ensures that all Coloradans will have the option to access natural medicines in the way that makes sense for them."

"We're thrilled to hit the ground running in the next few weeks to engage voters and begin collecting signatures to appear on the ballot in November," he said.

Rick Ridder of RBI Strategies, a spokesperson for the campaign, said that the initiative, once enacted, will help address widespread mental health issues.

"Many of us are, or know someone who is, struggling with depression, trauma, addiction, anxiety or other mental health issues. And during the pandemic, mental health challenges have only gotten worse," he said.

"The Natural Medicine Health Act would create a state-regulated system for safe and supported access to natural medicine like psilocybin mushrooms," he said. "Under the Act, adults 21 and older could access natural medicines that show promise in improving mental wellness while under the guidance of a licensed and trained facilitator at licensed healing centers, in the comfort and safety of their own home or in approved health care locations like palliative care facilities."

While four psychedelics reform initiatives from the campaign were in play, advocates have already pulled the first two and plan to withdraw the third, No. 59, which shared most of the provisions included in No. 58.

Both 58 and 59 call for a two-tiered regulatory model, where only psilocybin would be legalized and regulated for therapeutic use until June 2026, after which point regulators could expand the policy change to include other psychedelics that are listed in the proposal.

The decision to add additional psychedelics to the program would be made by the Department of Regulatory Agencies in consultation with a Natural Medicine Advisory Board that would be established. The board would be comprised of 15 members, including people who have experience with psychedelic medicine in a scientific and religious context.

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The key difference between the two is that one contains a component specifically authorizing people to petition courts for record sealing for past convictions that would be made legal under the proposal.

The group chose that initiative and is eager to begin signature gathering to try to qualify for the November ballot.

Under the proposal, the Department of Regulatory Agencies would be responsible for developing rules for a therapeutic psychedelics program where adults 21 and older could visit a licensed "healing center" to receive treatment under the guidance of a trained facilitator.

With respect to the initial two reform proposals that New Approach submitted before making the decision to pull them—Nos. 49 and 50—one would have legalized a wide range of entheogenic substances including DMT, ibogaine and mescaline, as well as establish a regulatory model for psychedelics therapy. The other would have initially enacted the reform for psilocybin and psilocin alone.

But recognizing that regulators would have been faced with an onerous task to set up rules for multiple psychedelics, they chose to revise them to create the two-tiered regulatory model with initial legalization of psilocybin alone while leaving it to regulators to potentially add more substances later.

There's another complication in the push for statewide psychedelics reform in Colorado. A separate campaign headed by Decriminalize Nature Colorado, which has taken issue with the regulations prescribed in the New Approach-backed measures, filed a competing initiative in January that is also making its way through the process of being able to collect signatures.

Decriminalize Nature Colorado's Nicole Foerster told Marijuana Moment that their group's "initiative to decriminalize entheogenic plants and fungi in Colorado has made it through both the review/comment and title board hearings and is on track to begin petitioning this month."

That one-page measure would allow adults 21 and older to possess, cultivate, gift and deliver psilocybin, psilocyn, ibogaine, mescaline and DMT.

Further, the measure says that it would be lawful to conduct psychedelics services for guidance, therapy and harm reduction and spiritual purposes with or without accepting payment. It would not be legal to sell any of the psychedelics, however.

Foerster said that the group believes "it is too soon to prioritize" setting up an infrastructure for regulated therapeutic access as in the New Approach reform proposal "without first ensuring full decriminalization has been achieved."

"Decriminalization allows for communities to organize and for more research to occur that will direct how future policies look," they said. "By proposing decriminalization and regulation at the same time, regulation is prioritized, and the crucial window of time between decriminalization and future policies is sealed shut."

Asked to share their thoughts about apparent advocacy "infighting" over the proper route for psychedelics reform, Foerster argued that the term is misrepresentative "because it does not take into account the true power dynamics at play when out of state corporate interest seeks to dictate policy to local movements."

In general, the Colorado ballot initiatives seek to accomplish something similar to what California activists are also actively pursuing with a proposed <u>ballot initiative to legalize</u> <u>psilocybin mushrooms</u>.

Meanwhile, legislative efforts to enact psychedelics reform are also underway in other states across the country.

For example, a Connecticut legislative committee on Monday discussed a bill that would set the state up to provide certain patients with access to psychedelic-assisted treatment with substances like MDMA and psilocybin. Former top military officials, advocates and scientists testified in favor of the proposal.

The Washington State legislature last week sent a budget bill to the governor's desk that includes a proposal to <u>direct \$200,000 in funding to support a new workgroup</u> to study the

possibility of legalizing psilocybin services in the state, including the idea of using current marijuana regulatory systems to track psychedelic mushrooms.

Last week, the Hawaii Senate approved a bill to set up a state working group to study the therapeutic benefits of psilocybin mushrooms and develop a "long-term" plan to ensure that the psychedelic is accessible for medical use for adults 21 and older.

Also last week, the Oklahoma House of Representatives passed a bill this week to decriminalize low-level possession of psilocybin and promote research into the therapeutic potential of the psychedelic.

A bipartisan coalition of Georgia lawmakers recently filed a resolution that <u>calls for the</u> <u>formation of a House study committee</u> to investigate the therapeutic potential of psychedelics like psilocybin and make recommendations for reforms.

Rhode Island lawmakers introduced a pair of drug decriminalization bills this month including one focused on psilocybin and buprenorphine that would authorize doctors to prescribe the psychedelic mushroom.

Also this month, a Missouri Republican lawmaker filed a bill that would <u>legalize a wide range</u> of psychedelics for therapeutic use at designated care facilities while further decriminalizing low-level possession in general.

Last month, <u>Utah lawmakers sent a bill to the governor</u> that would create a task force to study and make recommendations on the <u>therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs</u> and possible regulations for their lawful use.

An Oregon Senate committee also recently advanced a bill to ensure that equity is <u>built into</u> the state's historic therapeutic psilocybin program that's actively being implemented following voter approval in 2020.

A group of Maryland senators recently filed a bill that would create a state fund that could be used to provide free access to psychedelics like psilocybin, MDMA and ketamine for military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while also supporting research into their therapeutic potential.

A bill to decriminalize a wide array of psychedelics in Virginia was taken up by a House of Delegates panel in January, <u>only to be pushed off until 2023</u>. A separate Senate proposal to decriminalize psilocybin alone was later defeated in a key committee.

California Sen. Scott Wiener (D) told Marijuana Moment in a recent interview that his bill to legalize psychedelics possession stands a 50/50 chance of reaching the governor's desk this year. It already cleared the full Senate and two Assembly committees during the first half of the two-year session.

Washington State lawmakers also introduced legislation in January that would legalize what the bill calls "supported psilocybin experiences" by adults 21 and older.

New Hampshire lawmakers filed measures to decriminalize psilocybin and all drugs.

Legislation was also enacted by the Texas legislature last year requiring the state to study the medical risks and benefits of psilocybin, MDMA and ketamine for military veterans in partnership with Baylor College of Medicine and a military-focused medical center.

Michigan activists filed a statewide ballot initiative last month that would legalize possessing, cultivating and sharing psychedelics and set up a system for their therapeutic and spiritual use.

A pair of Michigan senators also introduced a bill in September to <u>legalize the possession</u>, <u>cultivation and delivery</u> of an array of plant- and fungi-derived psychedelics like psilocybin and mescaline.

At the congressional level, bipartisan lawmakers sent a letter to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in January, urging that the agency <u>allow terminally ill patients to use</u> <u>psilocybin</u> as an investigational treatment without the fear of federal prosecution.

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Connecticut Lawmakers Approve Bill To Fund Psilocybin And MDMA Therapy



Published 2 hours ago on March 18, 2022 By **Kyle Jaeger**



A Connecticut legislative committee on Friday approved a bill that would set the state up to provide certain patients with access to psychedelic-assisted treatment with substances like MDMA and psilocybin.

Before the vote, several members of the joint Public Health Committee remarked on the compelling testimony of top military officials, advocates and scientists who spoke about their experiences and the potential impact of the reform at a hearing earlier this week.

The legislation was approved on a noncontroversial basis as part of the panel's consent calendar. It now advances to floor consideration.

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Bipartisan Congressional Lawmakers Want Biden To Push UN To End International Marijuana Ban



Published 4 hours ago on March 18, 2022 By **Kyle Jaeger**



A bipartisan duo of congressional lawmakers filed a resolution on Friday imploring President Joe Biden to wield his influence to get the United Nations (UN) to end the international ban on marijuana by removing the plant from the list of controlled substances in a global drug treaty.

Reps. Nancy Mace (R-SC) and Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced the measure as UN's Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) wrapped up meetings for its 65th session this week in Vienna. CND in 2020 adopted a proposal to <u>delete cannabis from Schedule IV</u> of the 1961 Single Convention, but it currently remains in Schedule I, precluding member nations from legalizing the plant.

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Alabama Bill Would Force Women Who Want Medical Marijuana To Show Negative Pregnancy Tests



Published 5 hours ago on March 18, 2022 By Kyle Jaeger



An Alabama senator on Thursday introduced a bill that would require women "of childbearing age" to present proof that they're not pregnant in order to purchase medical cannabis products-a proposal facing sharp resistance from drug policy and civil rights activists.

Sen. Larry Stutts (R) filed the bill, which would amend the state's medical marijuana law that was enacted last year by mandating dispensaries to require any woman between the ages of 25 and 50 to provide "a negative pregnancy test either from her physician or documentation from a certified medical lab that has been ordered by a physician licensed in Alabama."

"The documentation must be dated within 48 hours of purchase before she may purchase any

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