

Testimony in support of Governor's Bill #16
Presented by Matt Simon, New England political director, Marijuana Policy Project
March 2, 2020

Dear Senator Winfield, Rep. Stafstrom, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Matt Simon, I live in Manchester, New Hampshire, and I work for the Marijuana Policy Project — a national non-profit organization dedicated to making cannabis legal for adults and regulating it similarly to alcohol.

For more than a decade, I have had the privilege of working on cannabis policy issues in my home state of New Hampshire and several other states, notably Massachusetts — where I served as a member of the drafting committee for Question 4, the ballot initiative that legalized cannabis in 2016 — and Vermont, which in 2018 became the first state to legalize cannabis for adults' use through the legislative process rather than by voter initiative.

I applaud the governor for bringing this bill forward and the committee for holding this important hearing. I support the bill. For my testimony, I believe the best use of my limited time would be to update you on what has been happening in some neighboring and nearby states:

- In Massachusetts, cannabis has been legal for adults 21 and older to grow, possess, and share with other adults since December 15, 2016. More than 40 stores have been licensed to sell cannabis, and three are currently operating within 15 miles of the Connecticut border.
- In Maine, which also legalized via ballot initiative in November 2016, cannabis has been legal for adults 21 and older to grow, possess, and share with other adults since January 30, 2017. The licensing process for retail stores was delayed because of opposition from former Gov. Paul LePage, but it is now under way. As of last week, regulators in Maine say they are “very close” to issuing the first round of cannabis business licenses, and they expect that sales to adults 21 and older will begin in June.¹
- In Vermont, cannabis has been legal for adults 21 and older to grow, possess, and share with other adults since July 1, 2018, but sales remain unregulated and untaxed. Last week the Vermont House voted 90-54 in favor of S. 54, a bill that would regulate and tax cannabis businesses in Vermont.² The Senate has already passed the bill in a 23-5 vote. A poll conducted by Public Policy Polling in February 2020 found that 76% of Vermonters support the existing law allowing

¹ <https://www.centralmaine.com/2020/02/28/state-expects-first-retail-marijuana-shops-to-open-in-june/>

² <https://vtdigger.org/2020/02/26/vermont-house-backs-legal-market-for-marijuana-sales/>

possession and 74% support the law allowing home cultivation; 76% say they support regulating and taxing cannabis sales.³

- In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo is calling for the state legislature to pass a cannabis legalization law in 2020.⁴
- In New Jersey, the legislature has referred a Constitutional amendment that would legalize and regulate cannabis for adults' use to the November 2020 ballot.⁵
- In New Hampshire, last month the House voted 236-112 to pass a bill legalizing possession and cultivation of cannabis by adults 21 and older — similar to Vermont's noncommercial legalization law.⁶
- In Rhode Island, Gov. Gina Raimondo included a plan to legalize, regulate, and tax cannabis in her 2020 budget proposal.⁷
- In Canada, national legalization took effect On Oct. 17, 2018.
- In Connecticut, all adult use sales remain illegal and unregulated. Of course, that does not mean cannabis is not available to those who wish to consume it. To illustrate how the unregulated market is currently supplied, last week a 62-year-old resident of Milford, CT — a pilot — was sentenced to a 2 1/2 year prison term for moving two tons of cannabis from California to Connecticut over a two year period.⁸

Thank you for your time and commitment to public service. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at msimon@mpp.org or 603-391-7450.

³ <https://www.mpp.org/states/vermont/vermontpoll/>

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/13/if-new-york-passes-legal-marijuana-federal-legalization-next/4603138002/>

⁵ <https://www.law.com/njlawjournal/2020/02/21/how-amending-the-nj-constitution-may-lead-legal-adult-use-cannabis/?slreturn=20200202102724>

⁶ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/02/20/marijuana/new-hampshire-house-approves-marijuana-legalization-bill/>

⁷ <https://www.providencejournal.com/news/20200116/raimondos-10-billion-budget-plan-includes-state-run-stores-for-recreational-pot>

⁸ <https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2020/02/26/pilot-pot-trafficking-norcal-connecticut-prison/>