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Recreational weed legalization in Pennsylvania could be gaining momentum with new bipartisan effort



Amen Brown, in his first term as a state representative from West Philly, and a Republican senator from Central Pennsylvania are working together on a proposal to legal recreational marijuana for adults. JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer

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A Republican state senator from central Pennsylvania and a Democratic state representative from West Philadelphia are teaming up on a bill to make Pennsylvania the 19th state [to legalize recreational marijuana for adults](#).

State Sen. Mike Regan, who represents parts of Cumberland and York Counties, and State Rep. Amen Brown said in a joint interview Tuesday that they would soon start holding public hearings to gather information and build support for [the legislation](#).

“This is going to be a very convoluted process. There are so many things we need to consider,” said Regan, who spent 24 years as a U.S. marshal and chairs the Senate Law and Justice Committee.

Regan on Monday announced his [intention to pursue the legalization](#) on his website, calling legalization inevitable given the trend in surrounding states. Both [New Jersey](#) and New York have legalized recreational marijuana. Others are expected to follow.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

A top concern for Republicans, Regan said, is [driving under the influence of marijuana](#). “Republican members are really concerned about how we handle the DUI issue,” he said.

For Brown, who published his [memorandum](#) on the proposal Tuesday, “the social equity component is going to be key, just making sure than any- and [everybody can have access to this industry](#),” he said.

Democrats have long supported cannabis legalization and have repeatedly introduced bills to do so, but Republicans control what bills get a chance at passage, because they have majorities in the state House and the Senate.

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Regan has a harder sell with his party’s leadership, but he said his background in law enforcement could carry weight.

“My leadership is interested in what Pennsylvania wants. A lot of what we do is go out and do the work. We plan on holding some hearings and doing some things and making the case,” he said. “I think at some point we have potential where we can get leadership on board,”

Regan is the second senate Republican to embrace legalization legislation this year.

State Sen. Dan Laughlin, a Republican from Erie who has been exploring whether to run for governor, became [the first when he said in February that he would co-sponsor legislation](#) with State Sen. Sharif Street, a Philadelphia lawmaker. That bill is in the final stages of being drafted, a spokesperson for Street said Tuesday.

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Brown said the proposal that he and Regan are working on would not allow home-grown cannabis, a key difference from the Laughlin-Street proposal.

It’s not clear that legalization support from one more Republican senator means much, though it is notable that Regan was an architect of Pennsylvania’s law legalizing marijuana for medical use, according to Chris Goldstein, a regional organizer for National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

“There is no significant support for the legalization of recreational marijuana in the House Republican caucus,” said Jason Gottesman, spokesman for House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff (R., Centre).

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A spokesperson for Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman (R., Centre), the top state Republican, said the senator had no comment.

William G. Roark, a principal at Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell & Lupin and chair of the Lansdale firm’s medical marijuana practice, attributed little significance to the announcement by Regan.

“Until we see the leadership of the Republican caucus embracing these types of efforts, they remain, in my opinion, unfortunately, largely symbolic,” he said.

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Judith D. Cassel, of Cannabis Law PA, a firm in Harrisburg, was more optimistic about the potential impact, saying Regan has a “powerful voice in the Senate” that leadership will listen to.

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