

ADDENDUM

Eau Claire County

• **Committee on Administration** •

Tuesday, July 10, 2018

2:30 p.m.

Courthouse - **Room #1273**
721 Oxford Avenue • Eau Claire, WI

1. Decriminalization of Marijuana – Discussion/Action

Post: 6/12/18 Media, Committee Members, Kathy Schauf

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From: [Keith Zehms](#)
To: [Cassie Limbeck](#)
Cc: [Angie Harmon](#)
Subject: FW: Cannabis Advisory Referendum
Date: Monday, July 9, 2018 12:13:29 PM

Cassie,

This is information I received from Nick Smiar. It is from a group that is for legalization of marijuana, but could be provided to the committee as background information. I could be sent with the addendum or handed out at the meeting.

Keith

From: Nick Smiar
Sent: Sunday, July 8, 2018 2:26 PM
To: Keith Zehms <Keith.Zehms@co.eau-claire.wi.us>
Cc: Gerald Wilkie <Gerald.Wilkie@co.eau-claire.wi.us>; Gerald Wilkie <gwilkie@charter.net>
Subject: FW: Cannabis Advisory Referendum

FYI
Nick

From: Wisconsin Justice Initiative [wjusticein@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, June 25, 2018 5:18 PM
To: Nick Smiar
Subject: Fwd: Cannabis Advisory Referendum

Hello Nick,

Stella Pagonis suggested you might be the right person to reach out to as Eau Claire Board Chair.

I'm with the Wisconsin Justice Initiative and we are assisting a number of counties across the state as they prepare to place cannabis advisory referendum on the November ballot. In fact, I was at a La Crosse Board Exec meeting just last week!

The issue is definitely trending as Michigan voters will decide legalization this fall at the ballot box and Canada is moving forward with full legalization of recreational use. Milwaukee County is moving forward with an advisory referendum and Dane, Brown, Rock, St. Croix, Winnebago, and La Crosse counties are also moving forward.

I'd be happy to talk with you about the possibility of an Eau Claire advisory referendum. I've included some key points on the issue as well as some sample ballot language.

Best,

Andrew Hysell
608-609-6742

The Case for 2018 Advisory Cannabis Referendum

Given the recent favorable trend in public opinion on cannabis, we are working with the Wisconsin Justice Initiative and others to place a referendum on the ballots of Wisconsin counties to determine

where Wisconsin citizens stand on the cannabis debate.

An advisory referendum on cannabis legalization is an opportunity for country boards to stand as leaders and facilitate the expression of their constituents' views on this trending issue.

We suggest a non-binding advisory referendum to gauge public opinion and give voters an opportunity to learn about a public health issue that will likely be before the legislature next spring. With full legalization and taxation coming in Michigan and Illinois next year, Wisconsin will face the issue as well. Wisconsin legislators will be looking to their constituents for evidence of support or opposition for legalization and a referendum will be invaluable.

Reasons Why Offering an Advisory Referendum Make Sense

Wisconsin is Being Left Behind

Neighboring states are adopting medical marijuana legislation, decriminalizing the product, or providing full legalization. Illinois and Michigan appear ready to fully legalize next year, with Minnesota likely to follow.

A Michigan initiative has recently been placed on the State's November ballot and the legislation would be approved shortly after. In 2008 Michigan citizens voted to approve a medical marijuana initiative by a 63%-37% margin. The new initiative for full legalization appears to have similar levels of support and will likely pass as well. The initiative will serve as the final vote on the matter and will likely make Michigan the first state in the area to fully legalize and tax cannabis.

Illinois will likely follow fully legalizing cannabis after this upcoming election. Cook County, which contains a little under half of Illinois' total population, recently held a similar referendum this March. 68% voted in favor of legalizing cannabis for adults. Further, several Illinois lawmakers have indicated that once a governor who supports legalization is elected, which will almost certainly happen this November, they will have the support needed to pass such a bill.

Minnesota, which is typically one of the more progressive states in the area, has not made any explicit moves seeking to legalize and tax cannabis. This could be explained by the fact that possession of as much as 42 grams of cannabis has been decriminalized in the state since the 70's, and medical marijuana has been legal for several years now, so there is less urgency to move to full legalization. However, Minnesota will likely follow suit with the rest of the Midwest shortly in order to reap all the benefits of legalization.

Our Economy Will Benefit

The economic benefit of cannabis legalization in Wisconsin will be substantial and immediate. Wisconsin would bring in at least \$138 million per year in tax revenue if cannabis is legalized, according to the State Department of Revenue. That figure is almost certainly extremely low because the calculations assume modest cannabis sales. Comparatively, Colorado (which has several hundred thousand fewer people than Wisconsin) has continually exceeded cannabis sale expectations and in 2017 received \$341 million from taxing cannabis.

Beyond the simple excise tax placed on cannabis, it will also provide Wisconsin farmers the opportunity to cultivate cannabis to meet the imminent demand of the Midwest. Wisconsin was one of the leading growers of hemp during the early years of the state and could be so again.

It's Better for Public Health

Cannabis is a safe product for sale and distribution. Last year, Wisconsin saw a record number of opioid overdoses (883), which was nearly an 800% increase from 2000 (111). The opioid epidemic continues to sweep across the nation, particularly in states with more rural populations. Comparatively, cannabis has never caused a single overdose death in its recorded use, and can be used to treat many of the same injuries as opioids. A recent study indicated that opioid related deaths were 25% lower in states that have legalized cannabis. Cannabis as a pain reliever could help the State of Wisconsin dramatically curb its ever worsening opioid problem.

Taking cannabis off of the street and putting it behind a government regulated counter would also have a positive effect on Wisconsin citizens. First, drug dealers generally sell more than just cannabis to their customers. This could lead to dependency on other substances, even though cannabis itself is not inherently addictive. By selling cannabis at a regulated dispensary, Wisconsin could see a dramatic drop in more addictive drug usage. Second, strict government regulations on the cannabis market will

ensure that the producers and distributors of the product are legal business people, as opposed to unlicensed sellers and foreign producers.

It is Criminal Justice Reform

Finally, cannabis could help decrease Wisconsin’s incarceration rates at both the state and local levels saving state and local tax payers millions of dollars. In Wisconsin, cannabis offenders accounted for more than 1,800 prison admissions from 2014 through 2016, according to the Department of Corrections. Far more people are booked into jails for having minor amounts of cannabis. Legalization would lead to reductions in unnecessary, harassing traffic and pedestrian stops.

For more information about cannabis legalization in Wisconsin, see <https://www.channel3000.com/madison-magazine/city-life/the-slow-burn-for-marijuana-legalization/687208791>.

Sample Ballot Language

Option #1

Should cannabis be legalized for adult use, taxed and regulated like alcohol, with the proceeds from the taxes used for education, healthcare, and infrastructure in Wisconsin?

Yes _____

No _____

Option #2

Should cannabis:
(Please select only one of the alternatives below or your vote will be invalid)

_____ (a) Be legal for adult use, taxed and regulated like alcohol, with the proceeds from the taxes used for education, healthcare, and infrastructure in Wisconsin?

_____ (b) Be legal for medical purposes only and available only by prescription through a medical dispensary?

_____ (c) Remain a criminally illegal drug as provided under current law?