



Article

Cannabis Law

July 2020

Israel Takes the Next Steps Towards Legalizing Recreational Cannabis

By Andrew J. Wilder and Jonathan Mahoney

Israel is considered one of the global leaders in medical cannabis research and innovation. In 1964, Professor Raphael Mechoulam of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was the first person to isolate and identify THC, the psychoactive chemical component in cannabis that causes a high. While limited use of cannabis for medicinal purposes has been permitted in Israel since the early 1990s, it took 53 years from Professor Mechoulam's breakthrough before the Public Security Ministry partially decriminalized cannabis in 2017, setting fines and treatment for initial offenders instead of criminal procedures.

Earlier this year, after much bureaucratic delay, the export of medical cannabis was finally approved and is estimated to generate hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue annually. Now, three years since its decriminalization, Israel is on the verge of legalizing cannabis for recreational use.

On June 9th, 2020, just one week after the State of Israel police minister declared that enforcement of the existing laws related to cannabis possession and use would be relaxed, two of Israel's largest political parties issued a joint statement, agreeing to move forward with cannabis law reform.

In the joint statement provided by Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White's Defense Minister Benny Gantz, they advised that reform to existing legislation was required with the aim to "resolve the issue of decriminalization and legalization" of cannabis in Israel.

In addition to legalizing recreational cannabis, the proposed reforms will also make it easier for patients to gain access to treatment and for producers to become licensed to grow and sell medical cannabis.

Less than two weeks after the joint statement was issued, on June 21st, two bills aimed to legalize recreational cannabis use were approved by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation of Israel, passing the first formal hurdle to becoming law.

If the bills become law, selling and purchasing cannabis for personal use will be legal for those 21 years of age and older. Sales will be made through authorized retail stores to the public. The legislation would also decriminalize the possession of up to 50 grams of cannabis while fully legalizing the possession and consumption of up to 15 grams by individuals 21 years of age and older.

On June 24th, the two bills passed their preliminary readings in the Knesset (the national legislature of Israel), ahead of the three votes required for them to become law. Notably, lawmakers from the ultra-Orthodox parties absented themselves from the votes. The law to decriminalize consumption passed 61-11, and legislation regulating how cannabis may be bought and sold was approved 53-12. Although no time frame was set to pass the bills into law, hopefully they will pass the remaining legislative hurdles over the remainder of the year. The **Cannabis Law Group** will keep you posted.

Authors



Andrew J. Wilder
Partner

Tel: 416 777 5402
awilder@torkinmanes.com



Jonathan Mahoney
Associate

Tel: 416 594 4486
jmahoney@torkinmanes.com

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