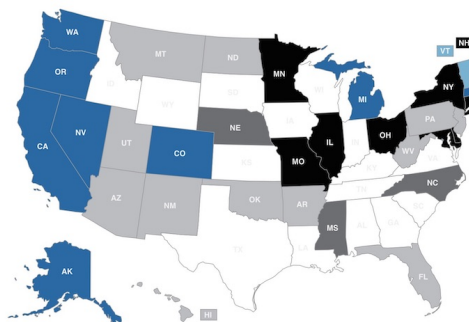


Five ways states can benefit from cannabis legalization

By: Ashley Pontius

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States with medical marijuana laws
States that have removed jail time for possessing small amounts of marijuana
States that have both a medical marijuana law and have removed jail time for possessing small amounts of marijuana
Marijuana is legal for adults and is taxed and regulated similarly to alcohol; state also has a medical marijuana law
Marijuana is legal for adults (no sales); medical marijuana law

Medical marijuana is legal in 33 states, but some have been slower than others to reap the economic benefits.

Advocates say this is because of a long legislative and legal process that [delays the rollout](#) of legalization and results in numerous restrictions.

“How the states regulate marijuana varies greatly,” says cannabis industry lawyer [Sarah Lee Gossett Parrish](#).

“Each state has to decide how much a patient can possess, where and how they can obtain it, and what medical conditions warrant a physician’s recommendation for its usage. The more permissive state regulatory systems result in more patients and usually in more dispensaries.”

Oklahoma: A case study

Parrish says that [Oklahoma](#), often seen as a conservative or red state, is regarded as one of the most liberal when it comes to medical marijuana laws.

Nonetheless, about a year after voters approved medical cannabis in Oklahoma, business is [booming in](#) the state.

Now comes Oklahoma’s “Unity Act,” signed into law in March. Parrish says it was designed to streamline state regulation of medical marijuana without impeding commerce and imposing too many restrictions.

“The Unity Act further develops Oklahoma’s medical marijuana program, an exemplary model for states that seek a more permissive regulatory scheme,” Parrish says. “There are compromises added for employers, but overall it benefits the patients and entrepreneurs. Oklahoma rolled out its medical marijuana program quickly and efficiently, wisely avoiding the quagmire of regulations that strangle the industry in other states.”



Five components of cannabis unity



bud, bowl, cannabis, cured

Parrish explains some key provisions of the Unity Act that promote the industry’s growth while ensuring proper oversight:

- **Sale of seeds.** “The Act includes language allowing commercial growers to sell seeds or clones to other commercial growers, thereby providing a much-needed legal way for new growers to obtain seeds and clones,” Parrish says. She noted that the legislature deleted some “language that would also have allowed the sale by growers to patients or caregivers.”
- **Patient confidentiality.** “The Act preserves confidentiality of patients and caregivers, making the handling of all records subject to all relevant state and federal laws, including HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996),” Parrish says.
- **Employment Issues.** The Act permits employers to refuse to hire workers for safety-sensitive jobs, examples of which are listed in the legislation. It provides that employers are not required to permit or accommodate the use of medical marijuana at the place of employment. “It also recognizes employers’ right to establish written policies about drug testing and impairment in accord with current Oklahoma law,” Parrish says.

- **Seed-to-sale quality and safety checkpoints.** The Act requires a medical marijuana seed-to-sale inventory tracking system, and mandates quality testing by licensees. “This includes testing for contaminants and THC/CBD content,” Parrish says.

- **New licenses.** The Act creates a medical marijuana transporter license, a testing laboratory license, research license, a caregiver license and an education facility license.

“These components show how the Unity Act represents a concerted effort to create a working framework for regulation and oversight,” Parrish says.

“It’s encouraging to see both sides of the aisle work together to achieve a common goal,” Parrish says. “Oklahoma is on its way to becoming a thriving cannabis industry, and that’s good news for everyone.”

Sarah Lee Gossett Parrish (www.sarahleegossettparrish.com) is a cannabis industry lawyer whom *The National Law Journal* named a 2019 Cannabis Trailblazer. She represents dispensaries, growers, and processors, and is admitted to court practice in Oklahoma and Texas. A member of the National Cannabis Bar Association, NORML and the National Cannabis Industry Association, she is admitted to practice in federal district courts and the US Supreme Court. Parrish served as chairman of the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women and was instrumental in starting the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame. Her legal thriller, *Guilt of Innocence*, placed second in the *New York Law Journal*’s national fiction writing contest.