

Medical marijuana applications roll in over the weekend

By: Catherine Sweeney The Journal Record August 27, 2018 0

OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma’s medical marijuana program generated more than \$2 million in fees over the weekend, but the agency won’t get to spend it for a while.

The Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority opened its applications for licenses on Saturday. Residents submitted more than 2,000 applications in a matter of days. Half of those were for personal use.

Tony Sellars is the spokesman for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, which oversees the marijuana authority. He said the total was at about \$2.1 million as of Monday morning. Interim Commissioner of Health Tom Bates told lawmakers it would cost more than \$4 million to implement the program, so those fees come in at less than half.



Tom Bates, interim commissioner of the Oklahoma Board of Health, gestures as he talks with the media following a board meeting in Oklahoma City. AP File Photo/Sue Ogrocki

“Keep in mind, that money that we’re taking in isn’t immediately available to us,” Sellars said.

The details need to be pinned down, but as of Monday it was unclear how long the agency will have to wait before having access to that revenue. It is also unclear where the money will reside until then.

The authority’s social media page offered periodic updates throughout the weekend on how many applications had been submitted. As of 8 a.m. Monday, more than 1,300 residents filed for personal medical use licenses. Sellars said agency workers are developing a breakdown of how many people paid the full \$100 for their licenses opposed to the Medicaid- and Medicare-discounted rate of \$20. The weekend drew nearly 300 dispensary applications, nearly 400 grower applications and more than 100 processor applications.

Sarah Lee Gossett Parrish is the director of the Oklahoma Cannabis Trade Association. She said the weekend instilled even more hope among her clients.

“I think it shows that there is certainly a lot of interest and a lot of opportunities,” she said. “I think it’s exciting, frankly.”

In addition to the support that Oklahomans have given medical marijuana, some of that success can be attributed to State Question 788’s fee structure, which allowed for lower barrier to entry, she said. It charges dispensary and processing applicants \$2,500.

“The fees for filing your application are such that it gives lots of people – the little guys and girls – the chance to get involved,” she said. “They might be shut out by some larger application fee amount.”

That could change. A group of 17 state agencies formed a working group earlier to tackle marijuana regulations. The Oklahoma Department of Health can enact rules that fall within the authority granted in State Question 788, but any changes to the policies in the state question must take place at a legislative level. That working group drafted an extensive list of recommendations to lawmakers, which included a significant hike in licensing fees. The letter to lawmakers states that Arkansas charges a \$15,000 application fee, and once the application is approved, another \$100,000 licensing fee.

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