

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Cannabis Policies for the New Decade”
January 15, 2020

Today the Subcommittee will have an important hearing about federal cannabis policies. While state laws and public perception around cannabis and its derivatives have evolved over the years, much of the federal framework that regulates cannabis has stayed the same.

In my home state of New Jersey, for example, state law allows for the use of medical cannabis and, at the end of last year, state lawmakers passed a referendum that will put the question of legalizing adult cannabis use to New Jersey voters on the 2020 ballot.

New Jersey is not alone in its state-level changes. In fact, the National Conference of State Legislatures reports that 33 states as well as Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia approved medical cannabis programs while 11 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands approved adult-use cannabis. Although some states have changed their own policies, national laws, such as the Controlled Substances Act, have yet to change in the same way.

That is why I am looking forward to hearing from the panel of agency witnesses who agreed to appear before the Subcommittee today. The Drug Enforcement Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse all play crucial roles on federal cannabis policy—from researching its benefits and harms to protecting the American public from bad actors. I hope that we can learn about what the agencies believe works, and what needs to be changed.

We will discuss six bills offered by both Democrats and Republicans, and some bipartisan in nature. These bills propose various policy changes such as rescheduling or descheduling marijuana, providing a safe harbor for patients and veterans who use medical marijuana, and streamlining cannabis research processes.

Given the evolving landscape in the states, these bills are worthy of further discussion. I am particularly interested in hearing about how federal agencies are reducing barriers to research and enabling research on cannabis to thrive. I am also interested in how the agencies are working together to regulate a cannabis derivative recently removed from the Controlled Substances Act—cannabidiol, or CBD.

Before I conclude, I would like to recognize Representatives Lee and Blumenauer, who are joining us in the audience today. They serve as the cochairs of the bipartisan Cannabis Caucus with Representatives Young and Joyce. Together they foster a continued dialogue on cannabis issues, and both helped author bills before us today. I thank them for joining us and commend them for their ongoing leadership in this area.

Thank you again to the witnesses for testifying before us. I am looking forward to this discussion. Thank you, and I yield back.