Calling Mass. lawmakers 'arrogant and cowardly,' marijuana activists to protest delay in retail pot shops at 'high' noon

Marijuana activists on Friday plan to protest Massachusetts lawmakers who passed a bill inserting delays into the new marijuana legalization law.

The protest is planned for "high" noon, outside the Massachusetts State House. MassCann/NORML is pulling together the protest. The group's full name is the Massachusetts Cannabis Reform Coalition, a state affiliate of the National Organization of the Reform of the Marijuana Laws (NORML).

The bill, which is on Gov. Charlie Baker's desk, delays key timeframes by six months. The bill does not affect personal possession and home-growing provisions that went into effect Dec. 15, 2016 as part of the marijuana law voters passed in November.

In a release, MassCann/NORML said they are "appalled at this arrogant and cowardly move, whose effect will be to give the black market another six-month monopoly and deprive the Commonwealth of the considerable revenue that it might generate in taxes from January to July."

The group also noted that the bill exempts marijuana cultivation from the definition of agriculture in state law.

According to the State House News Service, lawmakers passed the pot delay bill in just two hours. Three state senators and four state representatives were present for the quiet push.

The law passed by voters calls for a Cannabis Control Commission to be set up by March 2017 and retail pot shops to open in early 2018. Those timelines would be shifted over by six months if Baker signs the bill on his desk.

"We urge Governor Baker not to sign this shameful and unwise piece of legislation," MassCann/NORML said in its release.

Lawmakers on Wednesday defended the delay as a reasonable timeframe that gives the commission additional time to set up while legislators continue tinkering with the new marijuana legalization law. Among the changes they could make: Hiking the 12 percent tax proposed for retail marijuana.

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By: **Gintautas Dumcius**