



New Laws on Medical Marijuana Retail Stores

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Many municipalities have been struggling with how to handle requests from registered caregivers to operate medical marijuana retail stores. Existing law has been completely silent on the legal status of these stores and unclear as to municipal authority to regulate them. These ambiguities have created a breeding ground of confusion – some towns have refused to permit them, others have permitted them on the assumption that they must, and others have taken no action either way. Two new laws provide some clarity but may also pose a problem before both laws become effective. Here's a summary:

On July 9, 2018 the Legislature enacted two amendments to the Maine Medical Use of Marijuana Act which recognize municipal home rule authority to regulate registered caregivers. The smaller of the two, PL 2017, c. 447 (LD 238), was enacted as an emergency and took effect immediately – municipalities may now, by ordinance, regulate registered caregivers.

The larger of the two, PL 2017, c. 452 (LD 1539), is a sweeping reform of the entire medical marijuana statute. One part authorizes registered caregivers to operate medical marijuana retail stores. However, caregivers may only do so if the municipality has voted to allow them generally. In other words, once this law takes effect, new medical marijuana retail stores are prohibited unless the municipal legislative body affirmatively votes to allow their operation. This is similar to the municipal "opt-in" requirement for adult use marijuana establishments under the new Adult Use Marijuana Act.

But herein lies the rub: This opt-in requirement will not apply to medical marijuana retail stores until LD 1539 takes effect, which will not be until sometime in late 2018 or later. In addition, LD 1539 expressly grandfathered stores "operating with municipal approval" prior to the law's effective date. This means medical marijuana retail stores will have at least several months to become grandfathered before new stores are prohibited from operating without a municipal vote to "opt-in."

For municipalities that want to prohibit medical marijuana retail stores, or for municipalities that may want to allow them but need time to amend local ordinances to regulate them, we recommend adopting a moratorium ordinance. Since LD 238 is already in effect, there is no doubt that a moratorium applying to registered caregivers is now authorized.

Note that LD 238 also imposes new state registration requirements for medical marijuana manufacturing facilities. In addition, LD 1539 will grandfather medical marijuana dispensaries, testing facilities and manufacturing facilities that are "operating with municipal approval" prior to that law's effective date (again, sometime in late 2018 or later). Municipalities wanting to regulate or prohibit these other establishments should consult with local legal counsel about including them in a moratorium ordinance.

For MMA Legal Services' Sample Moratorium Ordinance Regarding Medical Marijuana Retail Stores, see the following link: <https://memun.org/Training-Resources/Local-Government/Marijuana-Resources>. (By R.P.F.) n