

## Minnesota Now (MPR) | Clearing up confusion about Minnesota's newest legalized THC edible 01G7ADDMNN8H60K25V1C70V4KS

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- CHRIS FARRELL:** Minnesota Hemp Stars saw long lines in a buying frenzy over the holiday weekend. Now, why? Well, Minnesota lawmakers surprised some by quietly passing a new law regarding edible THC products last week. Under the law, Minnesotans can buy edibles of 5 milligrams per serving with a limit of 50 milligrams per package. This is the biggest step Minnesota has taken toward recreational marijuana legalization. Minnesota House of Representatives Majority Leader Ryan Winkler helped pass the law, and he joins me now. Welcome to the show.
- RYAN WINKLER:** Well, thank you for having me.
- CHRIS FARRELL:** All right, so I think there's some confusion out here. So let's get the facts straight here. So what kinds of products are allowed under this new law?
- RYAN WINKLER:** The only products allowed are food and beverages in containers that are child-proof, are not marketed to children, and are sold to people over the age of 21. We are not talking about marijuana vapes. We are not talking about marijuana flower for smoking. We are simply talking about edibles and beverages protected for children and have some basic regulatory rules around them.
- CHRIS FARRELL:** OK, now, I have to ask you-- it's a naive question. It's an ignorant question. We're using this term, THC, so why not marijuana? What is THC?
- RYAN WINKLER:** So THC is basically a chemical compound. The Delta 9 variation of THC is the active ingredient, if you want to say it that way, in marijuana that produces the high effect. THC Delta 9 can also be derived from hemp, which is a different plant than the marijuana plant but come from the cannabinoid family. So essentially, you get the same chemical through a different process not using marijuana in a much lower concentrated form that can be processed and sold as THC.
- CHRIS FARRELL:** OK, so earlier in the week, you said that the push to legalize some THC edibles and beverages was purposely quiet. So what was the reasoning behind that?
- RYAN WINKLER:** I want to be clear that it was done in multiple public hearings in bills that traveled the regular route through the legislature. So I don't think it was necessarily quiet. It was simply not something we put out a press release on everyday, because sometimes, the legislature working quietly can get you farther than drawing a lot of public scrutiny. And I think maybe the Republicans that are working on this bill, because we needed Republicans in the Senate to vote for it, did not want to get scrutiny from their base for working on this issue with us.
- CHRIS FARRELL:** OK, so who's going to enforce this new law?
- RYAN WINKLER:** So it's a strange situation, but it's the Board of Pharmacy initially responsible for providing the regulatory oversight. When I passed House File 600 out of the Minnesota House of Representatives, it was a full legalization bill that included the creation of a Cannabis Management Board with full regulatory and enforcement powers to approve products, to enforce restrictions.

And we don't have that robust structure in place. So it's the Board of Pharmacy that's initially responsible, but I expect the next legislature next session to come back and look at these issues again and figure out exactly what kind of regulatory structure we need. And I hope that will open the door for further legalization.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So sticking to this law enforcement theme, are you in partnership with law enforcement about how to address this new norm, how to deal with this new norm?

**RYAN WINKLER:** We engaged for years with stakeholders of all kinds, including law enforcement when we put together our Cannabis Management Board and the legalization effort we passed in the state house, largely with DFL votes. Law enforcement was part of that.

What we're talking about here is not marijuana. It is not the traditional illicit marketplace for selling marijuana. It's not something that you smoke. These are products sold through regular retail operations, and there is a significantly lower public safety concern with these edible-type products, especially in the limited doses that we have in this law.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** So I want to break down my next question in two parts. So the first part, is this law creating a path, or is it part of a path that's being created to decriminalize marijuana use?

**RYAN WINKLER:** I think it's a first step. And I think that there is a lot we need to do to really accomplish the end of Prohibition and to right some of those past wrongs. First of all, we should not be wasting law enforcement resources on the cannabis prohibition laws we have. We have many more pressing public safety issues to be addressing with the limited resources we have.

We also should recognize that past records related to cannabis should be expunged if they were just for cannabis possession and sale. And we have a long ways to go in reinvesting in the communities hardest hit by the war on drugs, especially communities of color.

So there's much, much more to be done to properly do legalization. This is just opening the door, and I think we need to continue pushing that door open and really putting together the robust legalization plan that we laid out in House File 600.

**CHRIS FARRELL:** Yes, that leads to the follow-up question, which is you've mentioned legalization. Because there's a difference between decriminalizing and then fully legalizing. Do you feel that that's the path that we're now on?

**RYAN WINKLER:** I think we have to be, and I think that's where the public is. I think that decriminalizing just means you're not going to enforce marijuana laws that are still on the books. I think we need to take those laws off the books. I think we need to create a robust regulatory system around cannabis, whether it's hemp or marijuana, in order to make sure that consumers are safe, that we are taxing and putting that money back into address substance abuse and public safety issues.

To do this right, we have a whole robust set of proposals, and I think that is the path we are on. The key thing about this law this year, this new law, is I think it provides consumers access to a safe product that is now legal. And once people start having the ability to purchase this safely and legally, I think we're going to be moving--

**CHRIS FARRELL:** And representative Winkler, well?

**RYAN** Yes.

**WINKLER:**

**CHRIS** Yeah, there, you're back now. OK, we just lost you there for a second. Yeah, why don't you finish your thought?

**FARRELL:**

**RYAN** Oh, I think once consumers have access to a safe legal product, we are not going to go backwards.

**WINKLER:**

**CHRIS** Well, thank you very much for taking your time.

**FARRELL:**

**RYAN** Well, I'm happy to discuss it, and I hope that this is just part of a longer conversation in Minnesota about

**WINKLER:** cannabis legalization. We need to do it.

**CHRIS** Oh, I think that's for sure. That's a safe forecast or a safe bet. That was Minnesota DFL Representative Ryan

**FARRELL:** Winkler.