
Commerce & Gaming Committee

HB 1974

Brief Description: Establishing the Washington cannabis commission.

Sponsors: Representatives Shewmake, Blake, Peterson, Walsh, Chandler, Macri, Fitzgibbon, Appleton, Thai, Tharinger and Riccelli.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington Cannabis Commission, an agricultural cannabis commodity commission comprised of cannabis producers and a Department of Agriculture (Department) representative, with assistance from an advisory council.
- Establishes guidelines for the Department to administer a cannabis producer-initiated referendum, including requiring the Department Director (Director) to establish and maintain a certified referendum mailing list of cannabis producers.
- Authorizes the Commission to assess and collect an annual levy from cannabis producers for cannabis and cannabis products produced.
- Requires the Commission complete and submit to the Director an annual research, education, and training plan.

Hearing Date: 2/19/19

Staff: Kyle Raymond (786-7190).

Background:

Marijuana Licenses and Regulators.

The commercial marijuana licenses issued by the Liquor and Cannabis Board (Board) include the marijuana producer license, the marijuana processor license, and the marijuana retailer license. The marijuana producer license authorizes the licensee to produce marijuana for sale at wholesale to marijuana processors and other marijuana producers. Marijuana producers may also sell immature plants or clones and seeds to cooperatives, qualifying patients, and designated providers. Marijuana production may be indoors or outdoors.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Marijuana producers may also, but are not required to, be licensed as marijuana processors. Some businesses hold only the marijuana processor license. A marijuana processor license authorizes the licensee to process, package, and label marijuana concentrates, useable marijuana, and marijuana-infused products for sale at wholesale to marijuana processors and marijuana retailers. Neither a licensed marijuana producer or a licensed marijuana processor may hold a financial interest in a licensed marijuana retailer.

The Department of Agriculture (Department) operates a marijuana testing laboratory with the Board, and also regulates marijuana processors and their facilities. In addition to state agencies, local governments also regulate marijuana businesses through generally applicable business licensing and land use regulations. Local governments may also prohibit the siting and operation of marijuana businesses within their jurisdiction.

Commodity Commissions.

A commodity commission may be established for a particular agricultural commodity, and some commodity commissions are created directly by statute, including wine, apples, dairy products, and beef. A commodity commission also may be established according to the requirements of the Washington Agricultural Enabling Act (Act). Commodity commissions have been created through this Act for wheat, potato, fryers, barley, and other commodities.

The Department Director (Director) may provide, by rule, a method to fund staff support for all commodity boards and commissions if a position is not directly funded by the Legislature, and staff support funded is limited to one-half full-time equivalent employee.

Public Records Act.

The Public Records Act (PRA) requires state and local agencies to disclose requested written records to the public for inspection and copying upon request, unless the information fits into one of the various specific exemptions under the PRA or as otherwise provided in law. For example, certain agricultural information is exempt from public inspection and copying. The stated policy of the PRA favors disclosure and requires narrow application of the listed exemptions.

Summary of Bill:

Commission Structure.

The Washington Cannabis Commission (Commission), an agricultural cannabis commodity commission, is established. The Commission's stated purpose is to benefit of the people of the state and its economy.

The Commission includes 13 voting members that include marijuana producers and a Department representative. Specifically, the Commission's voting members are comprised of:

- eight cannabis producers that reside in, and are elected from, districts across the state;
- three cannabis producers that represent each cannabis production tier;
- a cannabis producer from any licensing tier or district; and
- the Director or the Director's designee.

An advisory council is established to assist the Commission. The advisory council includes four nonvoting members nominated by the Board and appointed by the Director, and the members

include a representative from each of the following: (1) the Board; (2) a marijuana processor licensee; (3) a marijuana retailer licensee; and (4) an independent testing laboratory.

Each cannabis producer, cannabis processor, cannabis retailer, and testing laboratory representative must be: 21 years of age or older; a resident of Washington; and licensed by the Board for at least three years before becoming a member. The representatives must continue to meet all membership qualifications throughout the member's term.

Commission members serve three-year terms. Of the initial members, five must be appointed for a one-year term, five must be appointed for a two-year term, and the remainder must be appointed for a three-year term. If a position on the Commission becomes vacant, the Commission must notify the Director, who must immediately appoint another representative to the unexpired term.

Committee Requirements.

The Commission must elect a chair and officers. The officers must include a Treasurer who is responsible for all Commission receipts and disbursements. The Commission must adopt rules for its own governance, which must include an annual meeting for the election of officers, as well as the transaction of other business. The Commission is also required to do the following:

- employ and discharge employees and independent contractors;
- retain private legal counsel, subject to review by the Office of the Attorney General;
- participate in proceedings relating to the production, regulation, distribution, sale, or use of cannabis, including the reporting requirements to the Public Disclosure Commission;
- acquire and transfer property, establish offices, incur expenses, and enter into contracts;
- maintain accounts with one or more qualified public depositories;
- maintain accurate records of all receipts, disbursements, and other financial transactions, available for audit by the State Auditor;
- create and maintain a list of producers to solicit opinions regarding the Commission's duties;
- expend money to promote the general welfare of the state cannabis industry, particularly to assist in the sale and distribution of Washington cannabis;
- sue and be sued as a Commission, without individual liability;
- receive such gifts, grants, and endowments from public or private sources for the use and benefit of the purposes of the Commission and expend the same or any income therefrom according to the terms of the gifts, grants, or endowments.

All costs incurred by the Department, including the adoption of rules and other actions necessary, must be reimbursed by the Commission. The Commission must provide funds to the Department according to the rules adopted by the Director. The Director may also provide, by rule, a method to fund one-half full-time equivalent employee staff support for the Commission.

Referendum Process.

The Director must conduct a referendum if the Department receives a petition containing five cannabis producer signatures. The referendum must be conducted within 60 days of receipt of the petition, and the referendum requirements are approved if: (1) at least 51 percent by numbers of cannabis producers participating vote affirmatively; and (2) 30 percent of the cannabis producers are represented. The Director is not required to hold a referendum more than once in any 12-month period.

The Department must tally the results of the vote and provide the results to the cannabis producers. Cannabis producers may dispute the vote through a written statement within 60 days of the vote. If the Director determines the referendum requirements are approved, the Director must: (1) appoint the members of the Commission within 60 days of when the referendum held; and (2) direct the Commission to put into force the assessment.

The Director must establish a list, and maintain the file, of cannabis producers from information provided by the Board. The Director must use the cannabis producer's: name; mailing address, and production by the cannabis producer in the preceding fiscal year. The list must be certified as a true representation of the referendum mailing list, and the information on each cannabis producer must be mailed to each cannabis producer on record with the Director for verification. All corrections must be filed with the Director within 20 days from the date of mailing.

The Director may require the petitioners to deposit money to defray the expenses of conducting the referendum. The estimated amount of cost incurred to conduct a referendum must be determined by the Director and provided to the petitioners before any service takes place. Petitioners must deposit funds with the Director to pay for expenses incurred by the Department, and the Commission must reimburse petitioners the amount paid to the Department when funds become available.

Annual Assessment.

The Commission must collect an annual levy assessed from cannabis producers for cannabis and cannabis products produced. The Commission must adopt rules specifying the assessment collection time, place, and payment method for producers who ship in-state and directly out-of-state. The Commission must develop a reporting system to document producers are reporting quantities of cannabis produced and are paying the assessment. All expenditures and disbursements made from this account must be made without appropriation.

The assessment levied by the Commission constitutes a personal debt of every person who owes the assessment that is due when the Commission calls for payment. If a producer fails to pay the Commission the full assessment amount by the date due, the Commission may add an additional penalty to defray the cost of enforcing its collection, and the penalty cannot exceed 10 percent of the assessment. If the person fails to pay an assessment, the Commission may bring a civil action for collection against the party, which must be tried and judged like any other debt due and payable cause of action.

The Commission must deposit assessment money collected in a separate Commission account in any bank that is a state depository. The Commission is exempt from the State Treasury daily remittance requirement for any money the Commission receives, collects, or expends.

Research and Educational Campaign.

The Commission may create, provide for, and conduct a comprehensive and extensive research and educational campaign that reflect the needs of cannabis producers. The Commission must adopt research and educational campaign goals that serve the needs of cannabis producers. The goals may include efforts to:

- encourage favorable legislative and regulatory treatment of legal state cannabis markets;
- promote of state cannabis-related agriculture production; and

- foster favorable investment conditions for state cannabis production.

The Commission must prepare and submit its research plan, its commodity-related education and training plan, and its annual budget before the beginning of its fiscal year. The Commission must submit these materials to the Director for approval, and the Director must review and make a determination of all submissions in a timely manner.

Public Records Disclosure.

Certain Commission and producer agricultural records are exempt from public disclosure, including financial and commercial referendum records, as well as cannabis production and sales records.

However, financial and commercial information and records related to the work of the Commission may be shared between the Department and the Commission. Records may also be used in any suit or administrative hearing relating to the Commission's work. In addition, general statements based upon cannabis producer reports may be issued, as long as the statements do not identify a specific cannabis producer or licensee. The Director or the Commission may also publish the name of a cannabis producer that violates a Commission statute or rule, as well as a statement describing the cannabis producer violation.

Liability.

The Commission's financial obligations, as well as liabilities or claims against the Commission, must only be enforced against the assets of the Commission. Liability for the debts or actions of the Commission does not exist against: the state of Washington; or any individual member, employee, or agent of the Commission or the state of Washington. The Commission's members, and its employees, may not be held individually responsible for errors in judgment, mistakes, or other acts, except for their own individual acts of dishonesty or crime. No person or employee may be held individually responsible for any act or omission of any other commission members.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 18, 2019.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.