

# Lawmakers question ballot campaign to repeal recreational cannabis sales

By **Bryan Hecht** Globe Correspondent, Updated March 23, 2026, 6:16 p.m.



Wendy Wakeman, a MassGOP member and strategist serving as spokesperson for the Coalition for a Healthy Massachusetts, a group behind a ballot initiative that would end recreational marijuana sales. She attended a public hearing held at the Massachusetts State House on March 23. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

A group of lawmakers on Monday questioned the woman representing a [ballot initiative](#) to repeal recreational marijuana sales, with some expressing concern such a move would create an illicit pot market.

“Are we not setting up a black market with this question?” asked Representative Michael Day, a Stoneham Democrat.

Wendy Wakeman, spokesperson for the Coalition for a Healthy Massachusetts, replied: “It’s a great question . . . That’s not how I look at it, but I see your point.”

Cannabis advocates packed the State House hearing of the [Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions](#), as part of a routine procedural step in which the committee weighs whether to adopt ballot initiatives before they land before voters.

The hearing was a rare face-to-face meeting of advocates from either side of the cannabis legalization issue, who have been engaged in campaigns and a [brief legal skirmish](#) with each other since state officials [authorized a petition push](#) last fall to do away with recreational dispensaries in the state. The measure is slated to appear on ballots in November.

“Legalization of marijuana has not been a net-positive for the state of Massachusetts,” Wakeman said as she began her testimony before the ten-member committee. She said her group included parents, teachers, employers, public health professionals, and doctors.

The repeal effort, which would not affect medical marijuana, was spearheaded by Caroline Cunningham, a member of the [Massachusetts Republican State Committee](#) representing Middlesex County. Wakeman is also a MassGOP member but [has said](#) the measure is not tied to the party.

“I have a lot of respect for anybody who is building a business in this environment, I just believe that the cost outweighs the benefits,” Wakeman added, as she fielded questions

from lawmakers about whether she sees any benefits to cannabis use and her response to cannabis investors whose livelihoods would be undone by the bill.



Wendy Wakeman argued public opinion has soured on marijuana legalization. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

She was also pressed about where the funding for her movement came from, which [received \\$1.5 million](#) from a subsidiary of Smart Approaches to Marijuana, a prominent Virginia group that opposes recreational cannabis sales, according to political finance disclosures.

That group also [spent \\$2 million](#) on a Maine antilegalization campaign which last month [failed to meet a signature deadline](#) and [won't be eligible](#) to reach ballots until 2027.

Wakeman spent her testimony arguing that public opinion on cannabis has soured, the legal market has done little to weed out criminality, and rising potency alongside a lack of conclusive research on cannabis use present health worries.

Senator Cindy Friedman, an Arlington Democrat, asked why antiweed advocates didn't instead propose a ballot question on conducting further research rather than prohibition.

"You are more than welcome to do that as a state senator," Wakeman said, clarifying that she was not involved with the ballot group until after the language of the question had already been finalized. "The data on cannabis use is scant . . . we haven't lived in a culture that allowed the drug and its use to be studied."



Drudys Ledbetter, Caroline Pineau, and Kristin Rogers wait to speak against the ballot initiative at the public hearing held at the Massachusetts State House on March 23. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Senator Paul Feeney, a Democrat from Foxborough, said that while studying cannabis within legalization frameworks may still be necessary, "I'm certainly not an expert . . . but I think the use of cannabis has been well-studied."

He also questioned why prohibition would be necessary versus increasing regulation on dispensaries and whether petitioners have contemplated such alternatives. Wakeman

said she didn't know.

Wakeman also said that her movement is not calling on the Legislature to pass the current form of the bill and always planned to put it before voters as a question.

“The impression I got from the questions that the committee had both for me and for the proponents was that they just didn't believe that anybody would want recreational marijuana to be wiped out. I don't think that's true,” Wakeman said in an interview after the hearing, adding she wasn't “fond of questions that attack funding.”

The proceedings opened with expert testimony from Jessica Troe, deputy director of research and policy analysis at Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center whose [September](#) report showed that revenues collected by the state since pot shops opened totaled nearly \$2 billion, or one-quarter of a percent of all revenues.

After Wakeman, a panel of cannabis business owners offered dissenting views.

“I am here in opposition to a destructive ballot initiative that is driven by out-of-state alcohol and gambling billionaires, trying to protect their own pockets,” said Caroline Pineau, owner of cannabis store Stem Haverhill, part of the state's economic empowerment program. “This repeal would decimate state and local budgets at a time we simply cannot afford it . . . [and] would replace a taxpaying industry that checks IDs and sells safe product with a market controlled by street dealers.”

Multiple testifiers against the bill cited out-of-state influences and “dark money special interest groups,” as being behind the push, though when pressed for specifics by Feeney they couldn't cite specific actors.

“It feels and appears to be people who have a lot of money and resources who do not want to see a legal regulated market,” said Armani White, owner of Firehouse dispensary in Hyde Park, who also testified.

In November, [The Boston Globe reported](#) on allegations, widely circulating online, that people collecting signatures for the ballot campaign misled people into believing they were signing petitions for affordable housing, fentanyl regulation, and other nonmarijuana related causes.

“I actually had a personal experience at Walmart in Walpole, they were collecting signatures and they . . . just didn’t seem appropriate,” said Drudys Ledbetter, a nurse and medical marijuana advocate, who spoke against the initiative at the hearing.

The measure faced an additional hiccup earlier this year when procannabis groups [sought to invalidate it](#), charging that the campaign “obtained signatures fraudulently,” before the State Ballot Law Commission, a quasi-judicial body under Secretary of State William Galvin’s purview. Ultimately, [commissioners ruled against the complaint](#), citing a lack of admissible evidence.

According to [University of New Hampshire polling](#) on Massachusetts midterm topics last month, the repeal ballot question remains largely unpopular, with 63 percent of Bay Staters opposing the measure, lagging behind other potential questions like same-day voter registration, rent control, and decreased income tax that received majority support.

If the measure does not pass in the Legislature by May 6, the campaign will have until July 1 to collect an additional 12,429 signatures to appear on the November ballot. If passed it would take effect on Jan. 1, 2028.

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