



## Denver may become the first US city to decriminalize psychedelic mushrooms

German Lopez

April 17, 2019

The city's voters are now deciding whether to decriminalize psilocybin mushrooms.

Denver is now voting on whether it should become the first US city to effectively decriminalize mushrooms containing the psychedelic psilocybin — also known as magic mushrooms.

Initiative 301 would designate “the personal use and personal possession of psilocybin mushrooms” among people 21 and older as Denver’s lowest possible law enforcement priority, and prohibit the city from spending resources to pursue criminal penalties related to the use or possession of psilocybin mushrooms among people 21 and older.

It would also “establish the psilocybin mushroom policy review panel to assess and report on the effects of the ordinance.”

The initiative would not legalize magic mushrooms; they’d remain illegal under state and federal law. And it wouldn’t decriminalize or deprioritize the production, distribution, and sales of psilocybin mushrooms — all of that could still be pursued by police.

Ballots containing the initiative were sent out Monday, Kyle Jaeger reported for Marijuana Moment.

Advocates for the measure argue that decriminalization would shift law enforcement resources away from pursuing nonviolent offenses. They claim that psilocybin is safe, nonaddictive or close to nonaddictive, and that a growing body of evidence suggests the drug has therapeutic benefits for illnesses ranging from depression to end-of-life anxiety to addiction.

Opponents worry that decriminalization could lead to more drug use. Especially in Denver, they’re concerned that decriminalization could perpetuate the city’s reputation as “a drug-friendly city,” Jackson Barnett reported for the Denver Post. Critics also point out psilocybin does have some risks — particularly, experts say, the possibility of accidents and traumatic experiences that can be psychologically damaging (especially among people predisposed to mental illness).

One potential source of real-world evidence here: Portugal. After the country decriminalized all drugs, it saw a decrease in drug-related deaths and drops in reported past-year and past-month drug use, according to a 2014 report from the Transform Drug Policy Foundation. But it also saw an increase in lifetime prevalence of drug use, as well as an uptick in reported use among teens after 2007.

But Portugal also simultaneously adopted special commissions that attempt to link people with drug addictions to treatment. Although the success of the commissions has yet to be thoroughly evaluated, it's possible that even as decriminalization increased drug use, the commissions and more access to treatment got so many people off drugs that drug use still fell overall.

Still, decriminalization alone may have its benefits. A 2009 report from the libertarian Cato Institute, written by Glenn Greenwald, concluded that decriminalization freed people from the “fear of arrest” when they sought help for their addiction and “freed up resources that could be channeled into treatment and other harm reduction programs.”

What effects psilocybin decriminalization would have in the US, Colorado, or Denver, however, remains to be seen. Even more so than marijuana legalization, this is an area of policy that's largely untested in modern America.

This kind of pioneering vote isn't new for Denver or Colorado as a whole. In 2012, Colorado and Washington state became the first two states to legalize marijuana for recreational use.

Other places, particularly Oregon, are considering measures to change their laws regarding psilocybin as well.

But in Denver, voters will make the final choice on their own ballot initiative by the end of May 7 — and could make their city the first to decriminalize magic mushrooms.