

NEW JERSEY MARIJUANA

Here's what N.J. thinks about Murphy's push to legalize marijuana

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By Brent Johnson and Susan K. Livio

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New Jersey residents are divided over legalizing marijuana, one of Gov. Phil Murphy's major campaign promises and priorities for the coming year.

A Stockton University poll released Wednesday found 49 percent of New Jerseyans said they were on board with expanding marijuana sales to adults



21 and older, while 44 percent opposed it and 5 percent said they were undecided.

"These poll results suggest there is not a consensus in New Jersey on whether marijuana should be made legal," said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton. 1

Nearly one in four pro-pot people said they were persuaded by the potential tax revenue it would generate, while 22 percent said marijuana is safer than alcohol, and 11 percent said it was safer than tobacco and other cigarettes. Another 11 percent say they favored legalization because it would reduce law enforcement or prison costs, according to the poll.

One in four people said they would try pot for the first time or continue using it if it was legalized.

More than half of the opponents said they feared legalizing pot would cause health problems and create more addicts. Nearly one-quarter said they worried it would provide a gateway to harder drugs the poll said.



Murphy's hope to sign a law legalizing weed has hit a snag, as some state senators -- including some fellow Democrats -- have informally said they will vote no. Sen. Nicholas Scutari, D-Union, has not yet scheduled any hearings on his bill to change the law.

On another big priority for Murphy, nearly two-thirds, or 64 percent, support his hike taxes on New Jersey's millionaires, according to the poll. A total of 29 percent are against it and 3 percent are unsure.

The move would give the state about \$765 million in new revenue.

But leaders of the Democrat-controlled state Legislature -- who would need to approve the hike -- have not embraced the proposal. State Senate



President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, has called it "absolutely last resort."

If they don't approve it, that would blow a hole in the budget, and lawmakers would have to find new ways to come up with revenue or cut government spending.

Murphy's budget for the year that begins July 1 also anticipates legalized marijuana generating \$60 million in sales tax revenues and fees.

As for Murphy himself? Many still don't know what to think of the new governor, the poll said.

The survey found 40 percent of adults view Murphy favorably three months into his tenure, while 27 percent have unfavorable impressions.



But about 1 in 3 adults are uncertain about Murphy. Ten percent say they aren't familiar with the Democrat and 23 percent say they are unsure what to think.

Of those who said they were familiar with the governor, 39 percent rated his job performance as good or excellent, while 45 percent said it was fair or poor and 19 percent said they were unsure.

But New Jerseyans overall expressed misgivings about where the state is headed, with 45 percent saying New Jersey is on the wrong track, 36 percent saying it's on the right track and 19 percent are unsure.

The poll of 728 New Jersey adults was conducted via phone by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. The margin of error was plus-or-minus 3.65 percentage points.

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Susan K. Livio may be reached at slivio@njadvancemedia.com. Follow her on Twitter [@SusankLivio](#). Find [NJ.com Politics on Facebook](#).

Brent Johnson may be reached at bjohnson@njadvancemedia.com. Follow him on Twitter [@johnsb01](#). Find [NJ.com Politics on Facebook](#).

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