

Williams has 'significant concerns' about state's regulation of marijuana

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

U.S. Attorney for Oregon Billy Williams says he has "significant concerns" about the state's ability to tamp down on illegal marijuana activity.

Williams, through an op-ed in The Oregonian Friday, offered a detailed perspective on Oregon's marijuana landscape for the first time since Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded Obama-era Department of Justice policies on the drug last week and gave local prosecutors discretion to pursue cases within the state-regulated industry.

It's not a favorable view: Williams was blunt about what he called Oregon's "massive marijuana overproduction problem."

Sixteen states have reported seizures of marijuana from Oregon, and federal agents and port police have seized more than \$1 million in cash connected with marijuana transactions passing through the Portland airport in the last six months, Williams said. And postal agents seized 2,644 pounds of marijuana in outbound mail and more than \$1.2 million in cash in 2017.

Williams, through a spokesman, declined a request for an interview with the EO/Pamplin Capital Bureau.

But in his op-ed Williams said that he wants to host a summit among law enforcement and other groups to share information about the state's problems to "inform our federal enforcement strategy."

Williams claims that producers can sell marijuana illegally for more money in other states, and the profit incentive drives more criminal activity in Oregon.

"This lucrative supply attracts cartels and other criminal networks into Oregon and in turn brings money laundering, violence, and environmental degradation," Williams wrote.

Williams also criticized a lack of information from the state, in particular an incomplete report from the Oregon State Police on a slew of marijuana-related public safety topics.

A draft version of that report obtained by The Oregonian in March, detailed significant problems with the state's regulatory system, "leakage" of Oregon marijuana into the illicit market and diversion of the product across state lines.

OSP was adamant the draft was incomplete. But nearly a year later, it still



Capital Press/Mateusz Perkowski

Marijuana plants grow in a high tunnel at a farm near McMinnville. U.S. Attorney Billy Williams said Friday that he has serious concerns about Oregon's ability to regulate marijuana.

hasn't been finished.

A spokesman for OSP did not respond to an inquiry regarding Williams' comments.

Meanwhile, the OSP analyst working on the report has since left the agency for the Oregon-Idaho High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, a program that supports "collaborative drug control efforts" among law enforcement agencies in the two states.

Chris Gibson, the Oregon-Idaho HIDTA executive director, said that he hoped the report would be done by the end of 2018.

The Oregon State Police are active in drug enforcement. For example, OSP seized 3,687 pounds of marijuana and over 1,500 marijuana plants in 2017, Oregon State Police Lt. Gregg Withers, who works in the agency's drug enforcement section, said.

The Legislature has taken steps to close regulatory gaps. In the 2017 session, for example, OSP was allotted seven additional drug detective positions.

And although state officials have touted the tax dollars and jobs created by the state's legal marijuana program, Williams said that the tax dollars going to public safety may not be enough. State police got \$12.75 million out of the \$108.6 million the state collected in pot tax revenues between January 2016 and August 2017.

"While state officials have allocated a portion of marijuana tax revenues to public safety organizations including the Oregon State Police, the net effect on enforcement remains an open question," Williams wrote.

Data released this week by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission also suggests that there are gaps in what would seem to be simple aspects of compliance.

On Jan. 10, the agency reported that 16 out of 66 pot shops surveyed in a recent OLCC sting failed to check that customers were 21 or older, the age requirement to buy marijuana in Oregon.

Williams wants to convene law enforcement and other groups to confront the problems.

"We need to have people in the room who can identify their interest, what the issues are, and work together to try and find some solutions," Williams told Oregon Public Broadcasting on Friday. "...Somebody needs to step up and take a hard look at where we're at thus far."

Oregon officials were quick to defend the state's recreational and medical marijuana programs when Sessions announced his stance last week. But the office of Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, did not immediately respond Friday to a request for comment on Williams' comments.

Governor releases priorities for upcoming short session

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown's priorities for the 2018 legislative session include efforts to pay down the state's public pension liability and tighten restrictions on gun ownership.

Brown, who is running for re-election in November, released five proposals Wednesday, ahead of the short session that begins Feb. 5 and will last up to 35 days.

Here are the governor's proposals:

• **Gun control:** This proposal lays out a previously voiced desire of the governor to close the "Boyfriend Loop-hole" by modifying state law to bar people convicted of misdemeanor stalking and/or domestic violence from purchasing a firearm.

The bill would also make sure that the "appropriate authorities" are notified when someone who is prohibited by law from buying a firearm tries to buy one, and have the state track information about those cases to learn where the reporting system can be improved.

• **Affordable housing:** The proposal would allow the state to temporarily waive fees and education requirements (in favor of training experience "on the job") for



File photo

Gov. Kate Brown has released five proposals ahead of next month's short session of the Oregon Legislature.

construction professionals to obtain supervisory licenses from the state.

It would also create low-cost loans, administered by Business Oregon, to encourage subcontractors to work on affordable housing projects in rural Oregon.

Finally, it would also hand out grants for new equipment and tools for construction workers through Workforce Investment Boards to bring down businesses' costs of hiring more people.

• **PERS paydown:** The state is facing an unfunded pension liability of about \$25 billion, and this proposal would create a fund to encour-

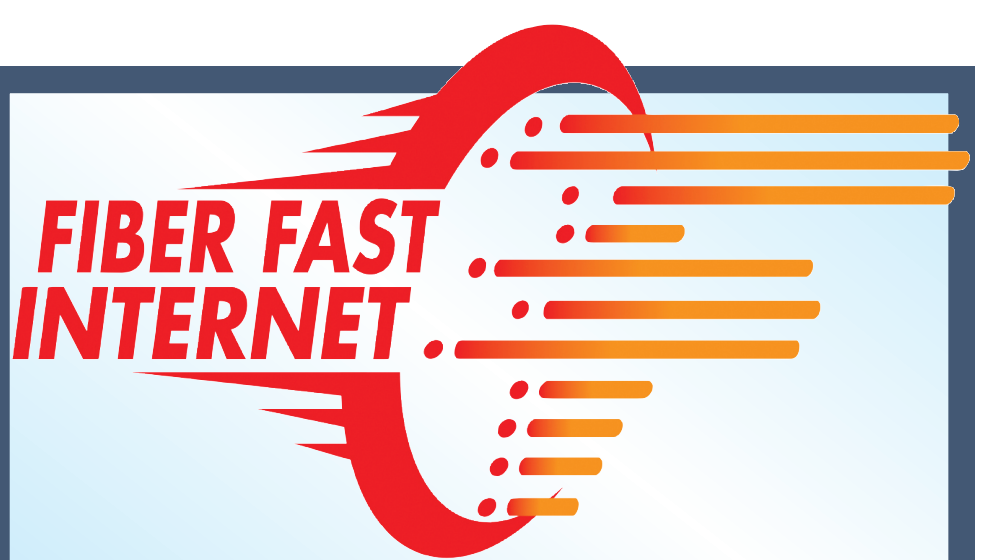
age public employers to save money to put toward their employees' retirement costs.

The state would contribute 25 cents for every dollar saved by public agencies, but it's not yet clear how much the proposal could shave from the unfunded liability, which is the amount of money that the state owes to retirees but can't currently pay.

• **Opioid epidemic:** The governor wants to "take the first steps toward" requiring drug manufacturers to register for the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, create a four-county pilot program to test the efficacy of peer mentors for people having a drug overdose, and require the state's insurance commissioner to study how to improve access to addiction treatment.

• **State procurement practices:** This proposal would take several steps to bring down state government costs by changing how the state buys goods and services.

The bill would have the state test a "reverse auction" concept that would have sellers of goods or services valued at more than \$150,000 compete to win the state's business, and test an idea that would have the state study whether requiring 30 percent of evaluation criteria to be price.



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