

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

Rauner uses veto to amend decriminalization bill

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The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Gov. Bruce Rauner used his veto authority Friday to alter a pair of marijuana bills, setting higher fines in a measure decriminalizing small amounts of the drug and scaling back an extension to Illinois' medical cannabis pilot program.

"I support the fundamental purposes" of the decriminalization bill, the Republican governor said, calling the criminal prosecution of marijuana "a

drain on public resources." But, he said, "any change must be made carefully and incrementally."

Lawmakers sent him a bill that would fine those caught with up to 15 grams of marijuana between \$55 and \$125. Rauner, however, lowered the threshold to 10 grams and raised fines to between \$100 and \$200.

In a separate veto letter, Rauner shortened an extension to the four-year medical marijuana program. Legislators approved a measure that would start the four-year clock after the

first cannabis dispensary is licensed. Rauner said he'll agree to an extension of just four months, ending the program on April 30, 2018.

"That extension would account for the delay caused in the final months of the prior administration," Rauner wrote, referring to former Gov. Pat Quinn's handling of licensing decisions.

The bills, HB218 and HB3299, now go back to lawmakers.

Rep. Kelly Cassidy, a Chicago Democrat who sponsored the

decriminalization bill, said the governor's action was frustrating because the bill "was a product of years of negotiations." Cassidy said she hasn't decided whether to agree to Rauner's changes because she wants to study data to see how many people might be affected.

Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat who sponsored the medical marijuana extension, said a four-month extension "does nothing to help patients," but he said it would be premature to say whether he'll call for an override.