

More than 250 new laws went into effect at the start of the New Year, many of which affect Lake County residents. Below is a quick synopsis of some of the most discussed laws that went into effect when the calendar changed to 2020:

Legalized marijuana:

The highest profile of the new laws that went into effect is the legalization of recreational cannabis. Illinois is the 11th state to legalize marijuana, which allowed adults over 21 to legally purchase and partake.

However, people are urged to understand the law before heading to their local marijuana dispensary. Illinois residents can only possess up to 30 grams of cannabis flower, 5 grams of cannabis concentrate and 500 milligrams of THC-infused products – like edibles - at any given time. Non-Illinois residents are only allowed to possess half of those amounts. Growing marijuana plants is only allowed for medical patients and they can only have up to five plants at once.

Residents are only allowed to buy marijuana at state-licensed dispensaries and may only partake in the privacy of their own home. People who ingest marijuana anywhere else can be ticketed for public consumption. Landlords are still allowed to prohibit the use of cannabis in their properties, and employers can prohibit cannabis usage and drug test employees.

Sexual education, identity and harassment law changes:

Sex education classes must include age-appropriate discussions on the meaning of consent in 2020. The new law details what must be covered in those discussions, including the idea that consent can be withdrawn at any time and that past consent does not constitute future consent. In addition, all single-occupancy restrooms located in public places are to be identified as non-gender specific. Also, people can no longer be removed from a jury based solely on their sexual orientation. The Workplace Transparency Act prohibits any agreement or contract from restricting an employee from reporting allegations of unlawful conduct—including sexual harassment—while the Civil Remedies for Nonconsensual Dissemination of Private Sexual Images Act allows the victims involved in revenge porn cases to recover economic, emotional distress, and punitive damages for up to two years after an image is disseminated or a threat to disseminate an image is made.

Then, the statute of limitations has been removed for sex assault and sex abuse charges for all ages, including minors. In previous years, prosecution could only be brought within 10 years of the offense, and only if the reporting victim brought it to the attention of law enforcement within three years.

Driving laws:

State legislators have increased the penalties for violators of Scott's Law in the wake of three Illinois State Troopers being killed in crashes in 2019. Scott's Law requires drivers to slow down and change lanes when approaching emergency, construction and disabled vehicles on the side of the roadway. Anyone who fails to do so will be fined a minimum of \$250 for the first violation, \$750 for the second violation, to a maximum of \$10,000.

In addition, the maximum penalty for hitting a worker in a construction zone has increased from \$10,000 to \$25,000, while those who disobey traffic-control devices in highway construction zone will face fines between \$100 and \$1,000.

Minimum Wage:

Illinois' minimum wage increased from \$8.25 to \$9.25 on Jan. 1 and will increase again to \$10 per hour in July. The wage will then increase annually until reaching \$15 per hour in 2025.

Education:

All Illinois high schoolers with a grade point average in the top 10% of their class will now automatically be accepted to the universities of Northern Illinois, Southern Illinois, Eastern Illinois and Western Illinois, provided the students meet other criteria. In addition, U.S. History classes must include instruction on the state of Illinois for all students in classes Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Consumer protection:

Companies that collect personal information about Illinois residents will be required to report any data breaches impacting more than 500 Illinois residents to the Illinois Attorney General's Office with a description of the breach of security or unauthorized acquisition, the number of Illinois residents affected, and any steps the data collector has taken or plans to take relating to the incident.

In addition, Illinois will expand privacy protections for people using direct-to-consumer commercial genetic testing companies like ancestry.com or 23andMe. Genetic testing companies will be prohibited from selling data to insurance companies where it can be used to set rates. The new law will require written permission from the test taker before the results can be shared.