



Americans for Safe Access

Activist Newsletter

Defending Patients' Access to Medical Marijuana

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ASA Lays Out Strategy for Securing Safe Access

This month, Americans for Safe Access is unveiling a new, three-year national plan for expanding safe access to medical cannabis. The multi-prong strategy for creating support at local, state and federal levels will be the centerpiece of "Preparing for Victory," a special series of workshops to be held April 17-18 in Warwick, Rhode Island.

"ASA has worked with our lobbyists in DC and some of the sharpest legal minds in the country to develop a strategy to secure safe access nationally by 2013," said Steph Sherer, ASA Executive Director. "We're excited to share our plan to both fully implement state programs and establish a compassionate federal policy. There are roles for so many committed individuals and groups as we expand our successful grassroots efforts, build new coalitions with



Steph Sherer

other advocacy groups, and pursue high-impact legal actions."

The workshops, which will help advocates build the political and strategic skills to make safe access a reality for patients everywhere in the country, follow the Sixth National Clinical Conference on Cannabis Therapeutics, which is being held April 15-17 in Warwick.

The national clinical conference, hosted by Patients Out of Time, includes a keynote address by the scientist who identified THC, Raphael Mechoulam, Ph.D., of Hebrew University in Israel, and a teleconference presentation by noted author and champion of holistic medicine Andrew Weil, M.D. The conference is part of a Continuing Medical Education series, partnering with the University of California.

"At the clinical conference, you will learn the science behind medical marijuana," said ASA Field Director Sanjeev Bery. "At ASA's work-

shops, you will build the political skills for securing safe access."

In addition to the workshops following the national clinical conference, ASA will be sharing key elements of the strategy with its membership through a series of weekly briefing emails this month.

Medical Marijuana Bill Goes to Maryland Senate

The Maryland Senate Judiciary Committee sent to the full senate a bill that would expand the state's medical cannabis law. By a margin of 7-4, the committee adopted provisions to protect patients from arrest and prosecution and reclassify cannabis as a Schedule II drug with accepted medical use.

ASA advocates were among those who helped convince committee members that they need to fix their state's medical cannabis law.

"The Maryland legislature recognizes patients should not be treated like criminals," said Caren Woodson, ASA Government Affairs Director. "We are working to make sure they

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ASA Chapters, Affiliates Taking Action for Access

ASA's chapters and affiliates across the country are busy with organizing and advocating on behalf of patients and caregivers in their areas. A few of the recent highlights of their activities include political lobbying in Michigan, California and Pennsylvania; signature gathering for an expansion of access in Oregon; and educating the community in New Jersey about the new state law.

On the grassroots lobbying front, in California the Silicon Valley ASA chapter has been organizing to convince the San Jose City Council to push forward an ordinance that would allow medicinal cannabis collectives to have storefront locations in that area. Patients and advocates attended the council meeting on March 30 to make their case.

In Michigan, the Metro Detroit ASA chapter has been engaging in lobbying and grass tops political activities with key politicians and opinion leaders, working closely with the Michigan ACLU, MPP and the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association on a statewide level. The Greater Flint ASA chapter, which has over 50 active members, has been more

focused on grass roots activities in Michigan's Tri-City area of Flint, Bay City and Saginaw. The patient and caregiver community has been peacefully thriving in that area of the state, thanks to the excellent working relationship Flint ASA has developed with the Genesee County Prosecutor.

In Pennsylvania, ASA affiliate Pennsylvanians for Medical Marijuana is working to push forward House Bill 1393, the Compassionate Use Medical Marijuana Act, which would allow patients and caregivers to cultivate and possess limited amounts of cannabis and establish state-licensed dispensaries. The group is holding a fundraiser on April 20 and a lobbying day in Harrisburg on April 21 so patients and advocates can visit their representatives. The House bill is awaiting a hearing before the Health and Human Services committee; a Senate version of the bill is expected sometime in May.

In New Jersey, the Coalition for Medical Marijuana—New Jersey (CMMNJ), an ASA affiliate, sponsored an informational town

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D.C. Medical Cannabis Law Enacted then Suspended

The medical cannabis initiative in Washington, D.C. passed its mandatory 30-day Congressional review period last month but was immediately suspended by the local District Council so they can complete regulations for implementing the new law.

Initiative 59, known as the Legalization of Marijuana for Medical Treatment Initiative, was approved by 69% of voters in 1998 but blocked by Congress from taking effect then. That ban was lifted earlier this year.

"We're extremely pleased that Congress finally decided to allow the District of Columbia's medical marijuana law to take effect," said Nikolas Schiller from the D.C. chapter of ASA. "We're also anxious to see the District Council quickly establish regula-

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understand what it takes to meet the real needs of patients."

The new bill would make the state's health department responsible for a medical marijuana program that would include licensing patients, caregivers, cultivators and distributors.



Caren Woodson

Maryland's current medical marijuana law reduces penalties for patients who present evidence of medical use in court to a \$100 fine, but

does not prevent them from being arrested, prosecuted or convicted.

A vote on Senate Bill 627 is expected within a week. The bill is a companion to House Bill 712, which was introduced by House Delegate Dan Morhaim M.D. If the senate bill passes, it will go to the House Rules Committee for consideration.

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tions that will grant voter-approved rights to patients, which have been denied for far too long."

The local moratorium follows a hearing last month on proposed amendments co-introduced by District Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray (D) and Councilmembers David A. Catania (I-At Large) and Phil Mendelson (D-At Large).

"The District Council needs to consider regulations from the patient perspective," said ASA Executive Director Steph Sherer, who is a DC resident. "Patients are not served by only allowing primary care physicians to recommend medical marijuana, limiting patients to a single caregiver, relegating dispensaries to remote areas, or jeopardizing sensitive patient information."

Once the Council adopts regulations, the law will undergo a second 30-day Congressional review period, as required by the Home Rule Act that controls local DC ordinances.

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hall meeting to educate the community on the state's new medical cannabis law, which took effect in January. The "New Jersey Compassionate Use Medical Marijuana Act" allows patients with qualifying conditions to possess and use of up to two ounces of marijuana a month with the recommendation of a licensed. Patients fighting such conditions as cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis and Crohn's disease can receive ID cards from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services that will allow them to obtain cannabis from state-licensed Alternative Treatment Centers by July 2010.

CMMNJ holds open, public meetings on the second Tuesday of each month at the Lawrence Twp. Library; the next meeting will be April 13.

In Oregon, ASA affiliate Voter Power is collecting signatures to qualify a medical marijuana initiative for the November ballot. Initiative 28 would create a system of state-regulated dispensaries and state-licensed medical marijuana producers. Dispensaries would have to be Oregon nonprofits and pay both a \$2,000 license fee and a 10% tax on gross sales. Licensed producers would have to pay a \$1,000 fee and the 10% tax. State-approved patients would be able to buy their supplies at any dispensary, and dispensaries would be able to buy from any licensed producer.

"The law works well for you if you live on a farm or can network with other patients, but if you're terminally ill in a hospice, you might be out of luck," said John Sajo of Voter Power, which also spearheaded the Oregon Medical Marijuana Act in 1998. "We'd like to do it like California, where patients can go to a dispensary and have myriad choices."

Advocates in Oregon need to submit 82,769 valid signatures by July 2 to make the November ballot. Organizers say they have over 90,000 signatures already and intend to file more than 120,000 by the end of May, leaving time to collect more if an unusually large number are ruled invalid.

ACTION ALERT: Ask Sen. Leahy to Challenge the DEA!

As Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy will conduct the confirmation hearings for Acting DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart. President Obama has nominated Michele Leonhart to be the new administrator of the DEA.

Please urge Senator Leahy to aggressively question Ms. Leonhart about recent DEA medical marijuana raids.

Over the past two months, the DEA has raided medical marijuana laboratories and cultivators in Colorado and Hawaii. To make matters worse, the federal government has assisted local law enforcement in dozens of other raids in California, Colorado, and Michigan.

1. Email Senator Leahy today: <http://AmericansForSafeAccess.org/AskLeahy>.
2. Make April 19th a day of action! Plan to meet at your local federal courthouse or other federal offices to protest the raids and hold the DEA accountable. If you live in Vermont or Washington, D.C., plan a lobby day to visit Senator Leahy's staff in person to urge that Leonhart be questioned about her recent actions against patients.

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