ASA Joins with Leading Patients' Group for AIDS Watch 2007

This past month, ASA joined with the nation's the nation's leading HIV/AIDS member-based group in a new initiative. To raise awareness about how safe and legal access to cannabis may help to support the best possible quality of life for many people living with HIV/AIDS, Americans for Safe Access partnered with the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) to co-sponsor AIDS Watch 2007.

AIDS Watch is the largest annual HIV/AIDS constituent-based federal advocacy and education event in the US. As part of the event, hundreds of activists and people living with HIV/AIDS visited Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. There they talked with Congressional representatives and staff about increasing federal support for HIV/AIDS prevention, research, housing, and—for the first time—medical cannabis.

ASA staff conduct a three-hour workshop during the AIDSWatch training day and distributed up-to-date printed materials to prepare AIDS Watch participants for lobbying their representatives on medical cannabis issues.

HIV-Positive Coloradoan Faces Prison; Activists Fight Back

"I don't want to die in jail," says Jack Branson, a Colorado man living with AIDS who faces six years in prison for cultivating about a dozen marijuana plants.

In support of Branson, local medical marijuana activists, led by the Colorado Campaign for Safe Access (CCSA), an affiliate of Americans for Safe Access, recently coordinated a protest in front of the Adams’ courthouse. Over 25 activists waved signs and passed out literature. The protest drew widespread media coverage, and several newspaper articles subsequently called for the dismissal of charges against Branson.

Branson, whose small personal garden was raided in October 2004, is scheduled for a June trial in rural Adams County.

To highlight the problem patients such as Branson face in Colorado, CCSA Campaign Director Brian Vicente was able to use the example of neighboring New Mexico in an OpEd that ran in the Denver Post.

"New Mexico's legislation stands to improve upon Colorado’s law in at least one important way. The New Mexican law charges its state Health Department with establishing distribution centers -or dispensaries- where patients can obtain medical marijuana.....

"This stands in sharp contrast to Colorado’s law which, while it provides real relief for many ill individuals, makes no provision for dispensaries and leaves patients in a legal quandary, unsure of where to locate this doctor-recommended medicine."

To learn more about the Colorado Campaign for Safe Access, a joint project of ASA and Sensible Colorado, please visit: www.safeaccesscolorado.org.

Join ASA in Celebrating our 5-Year Anniversary

April marked the anniversary of ASA’s founding in 2002. Five years later, what began as a local, grassroots resistance to federal raids on medical marijuana patients and providers in California has become a national force.

Over those five years, ASA has organized hundreds of protests in cities across the country to raise public awareness. We’ve created comprehensive educational literature designed to speak to patients, doctors, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Our toll-free patient hotline now gets hundreds of calls every month for information and legal support.

And the number of patients and activists who have download information from our newly redesigned web site numbers in the hundreds of thousands.

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In just half a decade, the ASA legal team has won significant victories for patient rights, including changing the policies of the California Highway Patrol and helping patients retrieve medical cannabis lost to police seizure.

We've worked with local and state officials to craft better laws and policies, including regulations allowing for medical cannabis dispensaries.

And we've now filed suit against the federal government to get them to stop saying that cannabis has no medical use.

As part of ASA's expanded national campaign, this year we've opened a new office in Washington, D.C., where two fulltime lobbying staff are working to show federal lawmakers why the time for change is now.

With more than 35,000 active members with chapters and affiliates in more than forty states, ASA is now the largest national member-based organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research.

It has been a great five years of hard work for ASA. With your continued support, we can make a difference in even more lives.

To help us commemorate our half-decade, please email your favorite ASA memories to Rebecca@AmericansForSafeAccess.org.

The ASA legal team has won a federal lawsuit on behalf of a California patient who lost his medical cannabis to police seizure. As a result of ASA's intervention, Michael Lee has received $8,000 from the county, sending a powerful message that local authorities must respect the property rights of patients.

The case began when Michael Lee had his 99 marijuana plants seized from him in a 2000 raid by the Contra Costa Sheriff at his home in Richmond. After charges against him were dismissed, Lee filed a motion for return of property as part of ASA's statewide campaign.

The Contra Costa Superior Court denied the motion on grounds that the case was still under investigation and that the statute of limitations had not run out.

After waiting for the three-year statute of limitations to run out, Lee, with ASA's assistance, filed another motion for return of property in August 2004.

At his hearing, Lee discovered that police had destroyed his property without his consent. The judge denied the motion for return of property, but made comments that were extremely helpful for taking Lee's case to federal court to argue Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment (due process) violations.

In August 2005, ASA filed a lawsuit in federal court on behalf of Lee to challenge the illegal destruction of his property. The case just settled with an agreement that Contra Costa County compensate Lee $8,000, the approximate value of the property.

The government has a monopoly on medical marijuana research materials. Call your representative to encourage the DEA to accept the February 2007 Recommended Ruling of Administrative Law Judge Mary Ellen Bittner.

"Hello, my name is _your name_ and I live in _city, state_. I am calling today to ask Representative _your Congressperson's last name_ to urge DEA Administrator, Karen Tandy to end the government's monopoly on medical marijuana research material. Follow the recommendation of Administrative Law Judge Mary Ellen Bittner and grant a Schedule 1 bulk manufacturer license to Prof. Lyle Craker of UMass Amherst and to private cultivators for ONLY federally approved research. Please let me know what you plan on doing. Thank you."

Leave your name and number.

For phone numbers of your representatives go to: www.house.gov or call the Congressional switchboard at: (202) 224-3121.

"Gear up" for medical cannabis activism with ASA's brand new line of products and literature. Check out ASA's new T-shirts, hats, stickers, bags and more!

All proceeds from the online store directly support the advocacy work of Americans for Safe Access.

www.AmericansForSafeaccess.org/onlinestore