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Office of New Mexico Governor Press Release

Governor Bill Richardson Urges Bush Administration to End Heartless Medical Marijuana Policy

Governor Also Directs Health Department to Resume Planning for Medical Marijuana Program

SANTA FE -- Governor Bill Richardson today sent a letter to President Bush urging him to end the misguided priority the Office of National Drug Control Policy has placed on threatening the prosecution of state workers for providing and patients for receiving medical marijuana relief.

"At a time when the scourge of meth is coming across the border, and cocaine and heroin use continues to ravage our communities, the federal government should be cracking down on real criminals---not people who are trying to help those in pain," Governor Richardson said in the letter to the President.

The Bush Administration earlier this year threatened to target New Mexico state officials with federal prosecution if the Legislature passed a bill making medical marijuana legal for the most seriously ill patients. Governor Richardson today vowed to fight the federal intimidation efforts, and use every state resource to fully implement the state law.

"Mr. President, you still have an opportunity to leave a legacy of compassion by adding an exemption in federal law for states that enact medical marijuana and be an ally instead of an adversary in assisting critically ill people," Governor Richardson said in his letter.

"Respected physicians and government officials should not fear going to jail for acting compassionately and caring for our most vulnerable citizens. Nor should those most vulnerable of citizens fear their government because they take the medicine they need."

Governor Richardson also directed the state Department of Health to continue planning to fully implement the law, including designing a program to provide eligible patients with access to medical marijuana. The Governor said he wants the Health Department to be prepared to start a program once legal hurdles, imposed by the federal government, are cleared.

Letter to President Bush follows:

August 17, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to raise my deep concern about the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy's misguided priority and wasted resources spent to intimidate states trying to implement medical marijuana programs that provide relief to citizens suffering from the pain of severe illness or injury. At a time when the scourge of meth is coming across the border, and cocaine and heroin use continues to ravage our communities, the federal government should be cracking down on real criminals---not people who are trying to help those in pain.

New Mexico, like eleven other states, passed a medical marijuana law to allow board-certified physicians to review and certify patients are eligible for medical marijuana to relieve the pain of patients suffering from debilitating conditions. Our Department of Health is now impaired in its ability to fully comply with new state law for fear of federal prosecution. That law calls for controls on the provision of medical marijuana to help protect the health of our citizens and not force patients to seek a remedy from potentially criminal elements.

The population that seeks this remedy is small and the program is strictly regulated. So far, only 60 patients have applied for state ID card and the Department of Health has approved just 30. I have listened to the personal and heartbreaking stories of this small group of people who suffer greatly each day, and like my Republican and Democratic colleagues in the legislature, I was moved to act.

Mr. President, you still have an opportunity to leave a legacy of compassion by adding an exemption in federal law for states that enact medical marijuana and be an ally instead of an adversary in assisting critically ill people. Respected physicians and government officials should not fear going to jail for acting compassionately and caring for our most vulnerable citizens. Nor should those most vulnerable of citizens fear their government because they take the medicine they need.

Sincerely,

Bill Richardson

Governor, State of New Mexico