



# Americans for Safe Access

Activist Newsletter

Defending Patients' Access to Medical Marijuana

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## ASA Hosts National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference

Americans for Safe Access hosted the Medical Cannabis Unity Conference and Lobby Day in Washington, D.C. at the end of February. More than 300 patients, advocates, and medical and industry professionals from 34 states met in the nation's capital for three days of education, strategy development, and skills building, followed by a day of lobbying federal officials.



ASA's Lobby Day press conference in D.C.

The weekend conference, titled "Bridging the Gap between the Public and Policy," featured a wide array of workshops and panels to provide advocates the tools to achieve policy change on medical cannabis, as well as Continuing Education sessions for legal and medical professionals. Presenters included elected officials, medical and legal experts, and accomplished advocates from the U.S., Canada, Israel and the Netherlands.

The keynote address was delivered by

renowned physicist John Schwarz, the father of Superstring Theory, who has recently become a public advocate on this issue. Sessions on medical cannabis science featured distinguished researchers and clinicians, including Dr. Sunil Aggarwal, Dr. Mark Ware, Dr. Donald Abrams, Jahan Marcu, PhD and Amanda Reiman, PhD. The American Herbal Products Association unveiled their first

guidelines for distributing cannabis, developed in collaboration with ASA. And patients, advocates, workers, industry professionals, and others shared their hands-on expertise in medical cannabis activism.

On Monday, a morning press conference on Capitol Hill was followed by a day of lobbying elected representatives. ASA conference attendees visited more than 200 legislative offices in support of two new bills to protect medical cannabis patients. The bills—

H.R. 689, to reclassify cannabis for medical use and allow research and state implementation, and H.R. 710, to permit an

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## Federal Medical Cannabis Bills Introduced

Two bills that would change federal policy on medical cannabis were introduced last month. One would reclassify cannabis as having medical use and allow states to regulate its production and distribution without federal interference. The other would give patients and providers facing federal prosecution the ability to present evidence at trial that they complied with their state's medical cannabis law, a defense currently denied them.



Rep. Farr

Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) and 11 co-sponsors introduced H.R. 710, the "Truth in Trials Act," a bill that would change the rules of evidence in federal court to give patients, caregivers, and other state-authorized individuals a defense to marijuana charges. The bill would allow federal defendants to present evidence that they were in compliance with their state's medical cannabis law.

"The federal government for too long has denied due process to defendants who can demonstrate that they were using medical marijuana legally under local or state law," said Rep. Farr. "This bill would ensure that all the evidence is heard in a case and not just the evidence that favors conviction."

Similar bills have been introduced in previous Congresses with support from ASA. The timing of the bills was coordinated with ASA to give participants in the National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference a chance to lobby their elected officials on the bills.

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## ASA Featured at RAND Event on Public Health Regulations

On February 11, Americans for Safe Access participated in a RAND Drug Policy Research Center conference and webcast discussion on developing public health regulations for marijuana. The roughly 160 participants in the Washington, D.C. event, titled "Developing Public Health Regulations for Marijuana: Lessons from Alcohol and Tobacco," included representatives from the California Medical Association, state departments of health, policy groups and both the US House and Senate.

ASA was the only drug policy advocacy group on the panel of presenters, alongside experts from RAND, academic institutions, and the federal government's National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Jill Lamoureux, director of ASA's Patients First Program, provided participants with some of ASA's real world experience, emphasizing that medical cannabis use requires a unique regulatory approach based on public health goals and the safety profile of cannabis relative to tobacco and alcohol.

Earlier this year, ASA was commissioned by the D.C. Department of Health to provide a training course that is required for all cultivators and distributors licensed by the District. The four-hour course includes an overview of medical cannabis clinical applications, safety and operational protocols, as well as participants' rights and responsibilities under local and federal laws.



Rep. Blumenauer

H.R. 689, the "States' Medical Marijuana Patient Protection Act," which removes federal barriers to medical cannabis research as well as state implementation, was introduced by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) with a dozen members of the House.

"Nineteen jurisdictions have passed laws recognizing the importance of providing access to medical marijuana for the hundreds of thousands of patients who rely on it," said Rep. Blumenauer. "It is time for the federal government to respect these decisions and stop inhibiting safe access."



ASA's National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference

**CONFERENCE**, continued from page 1

affirmative medical defense in federal court—are new versions of measures introduced in prior Congresses.

## Massachusetts Creating Medical Cannabis Rules

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) held "listening sessions" with stakeholders in February as it develops regulations for implementing the state's new medical cannabis program. ASA Board Member Dr. Karen Munkacy has been working with DPH alongside other patients and advocates to ensure workable rules for the program.

Among the issues DPH has sought input on are patient eligibility, medicine quantities, guidance and training for physicians, medicated food products, dispensary rules, and require-

ments for hardship cultivation registrations. The state has until May 1, 2013 to issue regulations, at which point DPH will begin issuing patient registrations and permitting medical cannabis dispensaries. Until those regulations are issued, the written recommendation of a qualifying patient's physician has the same legal force as a medical cannabis registration card. The law also allows qualifying patients to cultivate a limited supply of cannabis for their personal use until dispensaries are licensed and operating.

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Later that afternoon, ASA's legislative briefing for policymakers was attended by staff members from at least 30 Congressional offices, as well as the Congressional Research Service, which provides non-partisan analysis to federal lawmakers.

The 2013 National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference was co-sponsored

United Food and Commercial Workers, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, Veterans for Medical Marijuana Access, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and Dr. Bronner's. Thanks to the generous support of these and other sponsors, 125 people were able to attend the 2013 conference with the help of a scholarship.

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**NEW BILLS**, continued from page 1

"Congress has an opportunity to establish a sensible public health policy on medical marijuana," said Steph Sherer, ASA's Executive Director. "Overwhelming scientific evidence and popular support are on our side."

H.R. 689 would move cannabis out of the Schedule I classification Congress assigned it in 1970 and streamline the approval process for medical cannabis research. Currently, cannabis is classified as highly dangerous and having no medical use, and research controlled by the National Institute on Drug Abuse has focused on attempts to prove cannabis to be harmful rather than exploring its therapeutic efficacy or potential.

Co-sponsors with Rep. Blumenauer of H.R. 689 are Representatives Cohen (D-TN), Farr (D-CA), Grijalva (D-AZ), Hastings (D-FL), Honda (D-CA), Huffman (D-CA), Lee (D-CA), Moran (D-VA), Nadler (D-NY), Polis (D-CO), Rohrabacher (R-CA), and Schakowsky (D-IL).

H.R. 710, the "Truth in Trials Act," would establish a defense for medical cannabis defendants who currently have none in federal court, leaving most to take plea bargains to avoid long mandatory minimum federal prison sentences. Federal prosecutors have charged nearly 100 individuals with federal crimes because of their involvement with state-authorized medical cannabis programs.

Co-sponsors with Rep. Farr of H.R. 710 are Representatives Blumenauer (D-OR), Cohen (D-TN), Farr (D-CA), Grijalva (D-AZ), Lee (D-CA), McGovern (D-MA), Moran (D-VA), Pingree (D-ME), Polis (D-CO), Rohrabacher (R-CA), and Waxman (D-CA).

**ACTION ALERT: Ask Your Representative to Back Two New Federal Medical Cannabis Bills**

Two new bills that would help fix federal policy on medical cannabis are now pending in Congress. Contact your elected representative in the House today and explain why supporting these federal bills is so important for patients.

We've made it easy for you to take action! Just go to ASA's website and follow the directions to send your Congressional Representative a message today [AmericansForSafeAccess.org/HouseBills](http://AmericansForSafeAccess.org/HouseBills).

**Become a Member** **YES! Please accept my donation**

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