



House Bills with Cannabis Provisions Pending in Senate



July was a busy month for federal legislative activity on cannabis policy. The House approved several cannabis amendments for the 2021 spending bills, and pressed the Senate to accept the SAFE Act for cannabis banking language the House included in the emergency bill for COVID relief it passed in May.

Late July saw the House approve a package of FY21 spending bills, which included several cannabis policy reform measures. In a significant step forward, the Congressional ban on federal interference with state medical programs was part of the Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations bill from the start, rather than added via amendment as it has been each year since 2014. The House also approved an amendment to that bill that would for the first time extend similar protections for state adult-use cannabis laws.

ASA Partners with Cannigma on Podcasts

ASA is now co-producing an informational podcast for cannabis patients, caregivers, providers and supporters. The twice-a-month podcast with The Cannigma, an educational website dedicated to the healing properties of cannabis, will include segments during each episode dedicated to highlight ASA advocacy.

In the most recent episode, ASA Executive Director Debbie Churgai and Interim Policy Director Dustin McDonald sat down with The Cannigma's Michael Schaeffer to talk about the fight for legalization and access.

"While the acceptance of cannabis continues to grow throughout the world, ASA and Cannigma recognize the need for a greater understanding of the science, research, and human stories that surround the therapeutic benefits of cannabis," said Debbie Churgai, Executive Director of ASA. "We are excited to forge this new partnership with the Cannabis Enigma podcast to expand the ways in which we can educate the public on medical cannabis from a scientific perspective."

The Cannabis Enigma podcast provides insight from medical cannabis researchers, doctors, and patients sharing new developments, educational information, and personal stories.

"By understanding the science, pulling apart what we know and what we don't know, we

The House also acted to bar federal funds from being used to penalize financial institutions that extend services to cannabis businesses operating in compliance with state laws. Language from the SAFE Act that would make that significant federal policy change was included as an amendment to the Financial Services Appropriations bill for 2021, as well as in the COVID relief bill.

To be enacted, each of these provisions must pass the Senate as part of its versions of the bills or be added in the conference committee process that reconciles differences between House and Senate bills. Senators are unlikely to organize their 2021 appropriations bills until after the November elections.

In previous years, the reconciliation process has stripped many cannabis policy riders from the final bills. ASA and our federal advocacy coalition

partners will be deeply engaged in efforts to maintain this language in the final spending package for the next fiscal year.

Federal lawmakers also spent much of July working on the next COVID emergency spending package. While the version of the relief bill passed by the House includes language from the SAFE Act, the recently released Senate version of the bill does not. House and Senate leadership are currently working to find a middle ground. ASA and other advocacy groups, including banking trade groups, are working to secure inclusion of the SAFE Act in one of the two bills that include it.

More Hemp Programs Get Federal Approval

Hemp cultivation plans for Maryland and the Lower Sioux Indian Community have been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). They join Minnesota, Puerto Rico and Tennessee, which were approved by the USDA in June, bringing to 55 the number of states, territories and tribes where farmers can legally cultivate hemp and produce extracts from it.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has been resisting some hemp regulations, according to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. USDA rulemaking has also received pushback from the industry and some state and federal lawmakers, who have argued some rules on permissible THC limits are unreasonable. USDA has said Congress has to change the Farm Bill that authorized hemp production to alter testing thresholds.

The U.S. hemp industry is still waiting on Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules for producing and distributing cannabidiol (CBD) extracted from hemp. The FDA may classify CBD as a dietary supplement, but no rules have been issued. The FDA's public comment period on CBD has been extended indefinitely.

The FDA last month released a Congressionally mandated report on commercially available CBD products, finding that labels on many products were not accurate about how much CBD or other cannabinoids such as THC were included. The report was ordered by Congress last year.

can help ease the stigma around cannabis and encourage safe, legal access for everyone who needs or wants it," added Elana Goldberg, CEO of The Cannigma. "This podcast partnership with ASA is a step in the right direction."

Created by The Cannigma in 2019, the podcast will now be co-produced by ASA, and include segments during each episode dedicated to highlight ASA's advocacy. The podcast is available on multiple platforms. Find the links at safeaccessnow.org/podcasts.

ASA Virtual Event on Neurological Conditions

In partnership with the Sonoma Chapter of Americans for Safe Access, ASA will be hosting the Second Annual Cannabis Pediatric Neurological Symposium on September 26 from 9:00am-3:00pm PST. Speakers will include Dr. Bonni Goldstein, Dr. Deb Kimless, attorney Joe Rogoway and Jana Adams, who went to court for her daughter to attend public schools while using cannabis for her seizures. The symposium will include medical and legal information, family testimonials, company profiles, resources beyond pediatrics and support for caregivers.

Register for this virtual symposium today at: www.safeaccessnow.org/neuro20.

Activist Profile: Mike Whitty, Detroit, Michigan

Few people have a history of activism as long as Michael Whitty. He first became involved with cannabis law reform efforts in the 1970s in Detroit, Michigan, where he is active still. But his activism has not been confined to Michigan. Mike is known as Dr Detroit in both Detroit and the Bay Area for his idealism and activism.

Michael was deeply involved in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he lived for many years while teaching at SF State, University of San Francisco and Santa Clara University. He is a lecturer now on Drug Policy Reform at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

"I was baptized by Saint Dennis Peron," Michael says of the renowned cannabis advocate famous for saying all use is medical. "That was the ocean I swam in." He met Peron in 1985 at a Rainbow Gathering in the Ozarks. Michael, who was teaching at Santa Clara University at the time, became a member of Peron's original Cannabis Buyers' Club in San Francisco. He worked with Peron and a "who's who" of activists to help pass Proposition 215, the first state medical marijuana law, in 1996.

Michael was in the Bay Area for the federal raids in 2001 that inspired the founding of Americans for Safe Access. As ASA co-founder Steph Sherer was organizing protests for the federal trial of author and activist Ed Rosenthal, Michael supported Rosenthal's efforts. He became a member of San Francisco ASA, and has taught the Advocacy Module for Oaksterdam University. He participates via phone and zoom with California activists,

including the Brownie Mary Club of the California Democrats and Cannamaste, the cannabis spiritual group founded by Chris Conrad and Mikki Norris.



In Michigan, Michael, along with his wife Gail (51 years together), is deeply involved with political organizing. He was among the founders of the Cannabis Caucus in the Michigan Democratic Party and works to educate educators, prosecutors and lawmakers on cannabis policy.

"We achieved the state legalization victory in Michigan two years ago, but there are still prisoners serving long sentences," Michael says. "We're pressuring the governor to pardon them so they can be released. We worked hard to get her and the attorney general elected, but you have to keep reminding them of our support and what they still need to do."

Michael and other Michigan activists such as Brandy Zink, head of ASA Detroit, are also working with members of Congress on national legislation, including Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, a cosponsor of the SAFE banking bill that would allow state-licensed cannabis businesses to access financial services.

Coalition building is key to being effective, in Michael's view, but he sees many grassroots activists as inwardly focused.

"It's not enough to just hang out on the websites and stay in the 'cannabis ghetto,'" he says. "You have to get a seat at the table, whether that's by writing a check or getting involved with whatever political party appeals to you."

At 78 years old, Michael is not slowing down. He's still out in the community giving speeches and doing outreach with seniors.

Michael embraces the holistic health approach of physicians such as Dr. Donald Abrams who consider the lessons of Chinese medicine and bring a consideration of the whole person to a diagnosis. He carries the vision of activists such as Jack Herer, Denis Peron and Drs. Frank Lucido and Tod Mikyuriya.

"It's not just about palliative pain relief. Philosophical insights and visionary values help us better understand cannabis," he says. "We need to advocate for the non-corporate side of this. This can be an effort to restore community in an atomized world."

At the same time, he has an eye on how to get things done politically.

"In election cycles, we have to be involved with the campaigns," he says. "We need a Senate that will pass federal bills, so we have to pay attention to the practicalities that advance our issue."

State of the States Report to be Released at Policy Summit

This year, ASA will release its annual State of the States Report on medical cannabis access during the 2020 National Cannabis Policy Summit. The Summit will take place virtually on September 10, 2020 from 8:30am-5pm ET.

ASA's annual report evaluates the cannabis laws in each U.S. state and territory from the patients' perspective, assigning grades based on a rubric of many factors such as barriers to access, cannabis testing standards and civil protections.

Registration for the summit is free at: nationalcannabisfestival.com/ncf-policy-summit.

Action Alert: Urge Support for the MORE Act!

The MORE Act can help remove a number of barriers to medical research and access by removing cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act. Please urge your lawmakers to support the MORE Act. However, changing the scheduling of cannabis is only a step to ensure that cannabis as a medicine is a first option for anyone who might benefit. That is why we developed model legislation to create a new federal agency charged with ensuring that future cannabis laws protect, rather than punish, patients. Encourage your lawmakers to adopt and introduce our model legislation. Take action today at www.safeaccessnow.org/omcc_more.

JOIN TODAY!

YES! Please accept my donation

(check one) Monthly One-time \$100 \$50 \$35 Other Amount \$ _____

Name _____ Check or Money Order Enclosed.

Address _____ Visa Mastercard AmEx Discover

City, State, Zip _____ Card Number: _____

Phone _____ Signature: _____

Email _____ Exp. Date: _____ CVV Security Code _____

Mail to: Americans for Safe Access, 1624 U Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20009

www.AmericansForSafeAccess.org