The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) currently classifies cannabis under Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, a designation given to substances that have a high potential for abuse and no medical value. It is illegal under federal law for any Schedule I substance to be “prescribed, dispensed, or administered for medical use.” Other Schedule I substances include LSD and heroin. Cocaine and methamphetamine are classified as Schedule II, so they can be prescribed.

A key provision in the MORE Act would deschedule cannabis, meaning it would be removed entirely from the Controlled Substances Act. ASA has been advocating for the descheduling of cannabis since the organization’s inception in 2002.

“This groundbreaking legislation would eliminate barriers to cannabis research and provide access for patients throughout the entire country,” said ASA Interim Director Debbie Churgai. “It is time our federal government steps up to provide relief for patients everywhere.”

If the MORE Act is signed into law, it will remove a barrier to insurance companies covering the costs of cannabis for patients. ASA’s survey of over 500 medical cannabis patients found that affordability remains a significant challenge in states with medical cannabis programs, as described in “2019 State of the States Report.”

**Historic Cannabis Reform Passes House Committee**

For the first time, a measure to remove federal restrictions on cannabis has not just received a vote in a House committee but passed. Introduced by Rep. Jerrode Nadler (D, NY-10), H.R. 3884, the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act (MORE Act) passed on a bipartisan vote of 24-10 in the House Judiciary Committee on November 19.

The bill can now be brought to the floor for a vote by the full House of Representatives. If it passes, it will then be sent to the Senate.

The act, which includes elements from several cannabis-reform bills recently put forward in Congress, would deschedule cannabis, allow expungement of certain cannabis offenses for individuals, and impose a 5 percent tax that would be reinvested in communities adversely impacted by the War on Drugs.

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**Officials Say Law Stymies Vape Response**

An official from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) told congress last month that their investigation into vaping-related lung injuries and deaths has been hampered by the Schedule I status of cannabis.

CDC Principal Deputy Director Anne Schuchat told a Senate committee that they have had difficulty shipping samples for testing due to cannabis being illegal under federal law, and that legal barriers were “delaying” the agency’s analysis. The CDC has been working with various state health departments to identify hazards in vaping products, but those products need to be shipped to be analyzed.

More than 2,000 people have been reported to have lung injuries associated with vaping, and at least 39 have died. At the beginning of November, the CDC announced that vitamin E acetate was found in the lungs of 29 affected individuals in 10 states and has been identified as a “strong culprit” in the illness. Vitamin E acetate has been found in some illicit-market THC vape cartridges, but the FDA reports finding THC in only 70% of the nearly 600 vaping products linked to the disease that they have tested.

At the same hearing, an official from the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) suggested that if they could identify responsible parties, which is unlikely for any operating in the illicit market, they might pursue them under the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act.

On October 1, Americans for Safe Access issued patient-focused recommendations on cannabis vaping products. An independent analysis performed by CannaSafe, a PFC-certified lab in California, found that 10 types of underground market cannabis vape cartridges all contained myclobutanil, a pesticide that becomes poisonous hydrogen cyanide when heated. Heavy metals have also been identified in some cartridge designs.

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**New Incentive for Participating in ASA’s Research Partnership**

Last month ASA announced a new medical cannabis patient research program in partnership with Aurelius Data. As a gesture of gratitude for helping with this research, anyone who completes the survey by January 31, 2020, will be entered into a drawing to win a $500 gift card or a free VIP registration for ASA’s 2020 National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference in Washington, DC March 25-28.

Participants in this short survey (most finish in about 5 minutes) will not only be helping to expand knowledge of medical cannabis patients, but will also become eligible for the raffle. To participate in the anonymous medical cannabis patient research survey, go to https://research.aureliusdata.com/asaneews.

**Unity 2020 Theme, Scholarship Info Released**

ASA has announced the theme and opened scholarship applications for the 2020 National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference: “Campaigning for Cannabis: Making Policies Work for Patients.”

Each year ASA extends full and partial scholarships to patients and advocates all over the country to attend the Unity conference so their voices are heard in Congress and during the conference. Part of the mission at Americans for Safe Access is to ensure that medical cannabis patients can engage in the political process regardless of their financial situation.

The scholarship deadline is January 5, 2020. To qualify for a scholarship, applicants must commit to attending ASA’s congressional lobby day during the conference in March, and have taken action or attended an event with ASA in the last year. Scholarship recipients will be contacted regarding scholarships by January 18.

Funding for the conference scholarship program is limited, so this year ASA may have to award scholarships to only one attendee per state. However, if you would like to guarantee a scholarship for yourself, we have created a “Sponsor a Patient” sponsorship level. Any
Activist Profile: Cherron Perry-Thomas, Philadelphia

Cherron Perry-Thomas says she has long lived by Nelson Mandela’s adage that “a threat to justice to anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” After more than a dozen years in the natural products industry, Cherron came to realize that part of that threat is not having access to medical cannabis.

“My mission has been to give people alternatives for their wellness goals,” Cherron says. “If you have a headache, you may think tylenol is the only avenue to go down, if you don’t know about other alternatives.”

After teaching vegan nutrition classes out of her home, in 2005 Cherron started Green Dandelion Marketing, a sales and marketing company that has helped introduce almost 2,000 innovative plant-based products in grocery and health stores.

Her interest in the therapeutic potential of cannabis began even earlier, when a neighbor disclosed that using Marinol, the synthetic THC pills that can be prescribed, was the only way to control the vomiting from cancer treatment, but the medicine was very expensive, and cannabis would be cheaper but was illegal and hard for the neighbor to obtain.

“Being a law-abiding citizen, cannabis was something I knew little about and had never wanted to pursue, but that was the first connection with treatment I made,” Cherron says. It was eye-opening.”

At the time, Pennsylvania had no medical cannabis law, but Cherron says she knew she the herbal remedies she had were not going to help her neighbor. So when advocates and legislators in the state started to talk about medical cannabis, she paid attention to the moms with children with severe conditions and the patients who were lobbying for it.

When Pennsylvania in 2016 enacted a medical cannabis law recognizing 23 qualifying conditions, Cherron had come to understand it holistically – medically, nutritionally, and historically.

“People could go in a pharmacy 83 years ago and buy a THC product, but then that got prohibited due to racism, which made me angry,” Cherron recalls. “People had something they used but then lost due to bad policies.”

Through her company, she had a wealth of experience working with biodynamic plants and medicine made from plants. She says she had a “gradual bonding” with the possibilities of cannabis, once Pennsylvanians could apply for a card from the state, and decided to continue with the education she had been doing with herbs, just now with cannabis, too.

“The garden can be a holistic space,” Cherron says. “The plant can be therapeutic, but taking care of the plant can also be therapeutic for the caregiver and the patients.”

Outreach was the answer. In 2018, Cherron cofounded with Desiree Ivey the Diasporic Alliance for Cannabis Opportunities (DCOO), the first minority-owned cannabis conference on the East Coast. DCOO offers a conference workshop format geared to black and brown communities where experts and professional—doctors, researchers, dispensary owners—cover wellness, education. The 2019 DCOO conference was a free two-day event September 27-28 at Temple University in Philadelphia, with a legislative day Friday and seminars Saturday.

The cost of medicine is still at the front of Cherron’s concerns. She’s been working this session in support of SB 350, an adult use bill, which would allow co-ops where people can grow together. Her experience working with plants has shown her that reduced cost is not the only benefit.

“The garden can be a holistic space,” Cherron says. “The plant can be therapeutic, but taking care of the plant can also be therapeutic for the caregiver and the patients.”

ASA Training at MJBizCon

MJBizCon is hosting an event with ASA in Las Vegas during their Association’s Day on December 10, 2019 from noon to 4:30 p.m. at the Las Vegas Convention Center. ASA will be holding an educational event centered around product safety, compliance and social responsibility in the cannabis industry. This event will be free to all MJBiz registrants (space permitting). RSVP now to secure a spot for the day’s program and receive a discount code for $100 off MJBizCon registration.

This event is made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of CannaSafe, Eaze, 3C Comprehensive Cannabis Consulting, Dioscorides, ICCI, and You Gro Gurl.

ASA Keynote on Patients’ Rights at Cannawest Summit

ASA’s William Dolphin will deliver the keynote address at the seventh Cannawest Compliance Summit in Los Angeles, California, on Friday, January 24 from 8:30-9:00am. Dolphin’s talk on “Medical vs. Recreational—Patients’ Rights and Other Considerations” opens day two of the summit. The day will be devoted to medical issues, research and development, and Hemp and CBD.

On January 22, the day before the compliance summit, conference organizers are offering a “cannabis master class” on business matters. The Cannawest summit will be held January 22-24, 2020 at the LA Grand Hotel Downtown, in Los Angeles, California.

ASA is a supporting organization of the event, so ASA newsletter subscribers can use code 200219 and save 10% on registration.