



Growing Congressional Support for Medical Cannabis

With another strong bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives to prevent federal interference with state medical cannabis programs, policy reform is proving to be an area of growing agreement on Capitol Hill.

Amendments to spending bills have become the vehicle for advancing those reforms. The Senate has adopted one for the Veterans Affairs appropriation, and the House has attached three to the budget for the Department of Justice. All have been biparti-

san and show growing support in Congress for harmonizing federal policy with state laws that allow medical and other uses of cannabis.

The medical cannabis amendment that was first adopted last year passed again, but with stronger bipartisan support. Again offered by Reps. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Sam Farr (D-CA), the measure was sponsored by six Republicans and six Democrats. The final 242-186 vote included 67 Republicans, an increase of 18. Five more Democrats voted in favor,

leaving only 10 opposed. The Rohrabacher-Farr amendment to the Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) appropriation bill is intended to allow states to implement medical cannabis



Dana Rohrabacher

programs and protect those who participate from federal prosecution. Last year the amendment was not voted on by the Senate but was retained by the conference committee that reconciled differences between House and Senate versions of the bill.



Sam Farr

This year, the House also added two other cannabis amendments to the CJS bill that passed with even stronger support. One offered by Rep. Scott Perry (R-PA) that aims to shield the rapidly expanding state laws

allowing CBD-rich cannabis extracts passed 297-130. Another by Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Thomas Massie (R-KY) to block DEA meddling with states regulating industrial hemp production passed 282-146.

The Senate is also using funding authority to advance safe access. A budget amendment that would allow veterans to consult with their VA doctors about medical cannabis use passed a key hurdle in the Senate late last month. By a bipartisan 18-12 vote, the Appropriations

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Texas Governor Signs Limited CBD-Only Bill

Texas is now the 15th state to approve the medical use of a cannabis extract for limited conditions. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) signed a bill that will allow legal use of CBD medicines by those with severe forms of epilepsy that have not responded to other treatments. Abbott signed the measure into law June 1 in a ceremony with the authors of Senate Bill 339, Sen. Kevin Eltife (R-Tyler) and Stephanie Klick (R-Fort Worth).

the state by September 2017. To qualify, patients must have tried at least two conventional treatments unsuccessfully and have recommendations from two doctors who are either neurologists or epilepsy specialists.

As with the other 14 states that have enacted limited CBD-only laws in the last year or so, Texas lawmakers were lobbied by parents such as the Davis family from North Texas who have children with severe seizure disorders. Broader use of cannabis medicines is allowed by 23 other states and the District of Columbia.

The bill directs the Texas Department of Public Safety to license at least three dispensaries in

Puerto Rico Gov. Launches Medical Cannabis

Officials in Puerto Rico are working on rules for a medical cannabis program in the U.S. territory. The governor, Alejandro Garcia Padilla, issued an executive order early in May that authorizes Health Department Secretary Ana Rius to allow the medical use of "some or all controlled substances or components of the cannabis plant" and to report within three months on a program to do so. The University of Puerto Rico is a likely participant in a medical cannabis program.

The executive order comes after a series of public hearings on the island. The possession of any amount of cannabis in Puerto Rico is currently punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of \$5,000.

If the program is established, Puerto Rico would become the second U.S. Territory that allows medical cannabis use. Guam established safe access by voter initiative in November 2014.

Florida Court Clears Way for Cultivation Licenses

Officials in Florida have been cleared to take applications this month from nurseries seeking one of five licenses to produce cannabis medicines in the state. A state judge rejected a challenge to the state's licensing process that alleged big nurseries were given an unfair advantage.

The decision makes the state Department of Health rules final, provided the plaintiff does not appeal. Those granted licenses will be authorized to produce medicines high in CBD and low in THC and distribute them to qualified patients who suffer from epilepsy or other debilitating conditions.

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Louisiana Poised to Pass Restrictive Bill

A limited medical cannabis bill is making its way toward the desk of Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal. The legislation, which has already passed the state Senate, was unanimously approved by a committee in the state House of Representatives at the end of May, sending it for a full vote before the House, then back to the Senate for final approval.

alongside existing pharmacies. Qualifying conditions are restricted to glaucoma, spastic quadriplegia and side effects of chemotherapy, but the state medical board is directed to recommend other qualifying conditions to be added in the next legislative session.

The new law, Senate Bill 143, sponsored by Sen. Fred Mills (R-New Iberia), gives three state agencies responsibility for establishing regulations. The state's Board of Medical Examiners is to set rules for how recommendations are to

If the bill (SB 143) is adopted into law, qualified patients could register to obtain limited forms of cannabis medicines from one of 10 dispensaries that would be established in the state

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ASA California Citizen Lobby Day June 14-15

CA ASA's California Citizen Lobby Day, June 14-15, is bringing patient voices to Sacramento. This two-day event will be the biggest California lobby day yet, featuring workshops on local regulations and voter initiatives, special legislative briefings, citizen lobbyist training, and much more.

ASA has been lobbying in support of AB 258, the Medical Cannabis Organ Transplant Act, which would end discrimination against med-

ical cannabis patients in the organ transplant process. The bill passed the Assembly on April 30 by a vote of 52 to 8, with 20 assembly members not voting. California Assembly Member Marc Levine (D-San Rafael) introduced AB 258 after two ASA members visited his office last year as part of the annual medical cannabis lobby day in the state legislature.

The requested donation is \$25, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Oregon Senate Sends Regulatory Bill to House

OR The Oregon Senate has voted 29-1 to tighten regulations on the state's medical cannabis program, but the measure now goes to the House, where it faces opposition. If enacted, the new law would limit the number of plants at any cultivation site and require inspections and product tracking.

Most contentious has been a provision that would allow local governments to ban all

cannabis businesses from operating, including dispensaries, cultivation sites and testing labs.

The proposed changes are part of legislators' efforts to implement a voter initiative passed last November that allows cannabis possession and use by anyone 21 or over as of July 1. State officials have suggested that current medical cultivators could be licensed to produce cannabis for both markets under regulatory oversight.

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The 2014 law created by the legislature went into effect last July but has faced legal challenges and bureaucratic hurdles. The state's initial licensing procedure was rejected by the same judge who has now approved the current plan. The Florida Department of Health issued a statement following the ruling, saying, "We are moving swiftly to facilitate access to the product before the end of the year."

In addition to significant financial requirements, to apply for a state license a nursery must have been in business at least 30 years and be able to produce at least 400,000 plants. One license is to be issued in each of five regions: Southeast, Southwest, Central, Northwest and Northeast Florida. If only one qualifying business applies in a region, a license could be issued immediately; otherwise, the state has 90 days to decide.

ACTION ALERT: Tell Congress to Pass the CARERS Act

Congress has the chance to take comprehensive action on medical cannabis with the Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States (CARERS) Act. First introduced in the Senate, a bipartisan companion bill is now also in the House.

Take action today! Tell your Senators and Representative they need to resolve the conflicts between new state laws and outdated federal policies. CARERS would do that, as well as reschedule cannabis, allow VA doctors to discuss medical cannabis with veterans, and allow cannabis businesses to have bank accounts. Sign the Petition to tell Congress to support the CARERS Act at SafeAccessNow.org/carers.

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Committee approved a budget amendment that will override a 2011 policy directive that prohibits VA doctors from providing veterans with the recommendations they need to participate in state medical cannabis programs. Many veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries say cannabis is effective for symptoms like pain, anxiety, nausea and disturbed sleep.



Sen. Daines



Sen. Merkley

The amendment offered by Steve Daines (R-Mont.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) is attached to the \$77.6 billion funding bill for military construction and veterans benefits. The vote marks the first time the US Senate has directly approved a measure that supports medical cannabis access. Among those voting in favor was California Senator Diane Feinstein, who has previously been an outspoken opponent of medical cannabis reforms.

A similar amendment was offered on the House version of the bill but narrowly failed. The House and Senate must resolve that and other differences in the military appropriations bill before it becomes law. Either the House can vote to adopt the Senate version, or the house and Senate will create a conference committee to hammer it out.

The amendment attempts to change VHA policy by barring "the use of funds to interfere with the ability of veterans to participate in State-approved medicinal marijuana programs or deny services to such veterans."

The provisions of the amendment are also part of the Compassionate Access, Research Expansion and Respect States Act (CARERS), a larger bipartisan bill to legalize medical cannabis at the federal level. The Senate has not held any hearings on that bill, which is sponsored by Rand Paul (R-KY), Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

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be issued and by whom. The Department of Agriculture is to oversee the state's one cultivation facility. And the Board of Pharmacy will set rules about dispensary operations

The Louisiana Legislature legalized cannabis for medical use in 1978 and again in 1991 but created no mechanism for distribution. The new measure has a five-year "sunset provision" that means it will have to be reauthorized in 2020

Gov. Bobby Jindal said last month that he would sign the legislation.

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