



Americans for Safe Access

Activist Newsletter

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Defending Patients' Access to Medical Marijuana

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CARERS Revived in Congress with Added Co-Sponsors



Comprehensive bipartisan, bicameral legislation to harmonize state medical cannabis programs with federal law has again been introduced in the U.S. Congress. The Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States Act of 2017 (CARERS) was announced June 15 at a press conference organized by ASA with Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), as well as several affected patients. A similar pair of bills were introduced in the 114th Congress but never received a hearing, despite attracting 19 cosponsors representing 15 states.



Sen. Booker with affected patients

returns as an initial cosponsor with Rep. Cohen in the House.

Additional Senate co-sponsors include Rand Paul (R-KY) and Al Franken (D-MN), with the addition for 2017 of Mike Lee (R-UT) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

The CARERS Act would reduce the role of the federal government in formulating drug policy and allows states to make determinations on their own medical cannabis policies.

The 2017 version of the bill drops provisions that would have down-scheduled cannabis and allowed state-licensed businesses to use banking services, both of which drew Senate opposition to the last bill.

"Patients need the Senate to pass CARERS," said ASA Executive Director Steph Sherer. "That's why we've made an easy online tool at safeaccessnow.org/carers2017 for advocates to contact their senators today."

The CARERS Act is not the only pending bipartisan bill seeking to bridge federal and state laws. In the House, Reps. Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Mike Coffman (R-CO) last month reintroduced the Respect States' and Citizens' Rights Act of 2017, which would block federal interference with state law. The bill has been offered each of the last three years.

PFC at Forefront of International Standards



ASA's effort to set scientifically sound standards for cannabis safety and quality has found new partners and gone international. ASA's Patient Focused Certification (PFC) program is now leading the development of international regulatory guidelines, presenting to public health officials and industry stakeholders around the globe, conducting trainings in the US and abroad, and partnering with the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy on cannabis education.



Spearheading the effort is ASA's chief scientist Jahan Marcu, PhD, in his role as a director of the PFC program. Just this past month, Dr. Marcu has crisscrossed the globe collaborating with doctors, scientists and public health officials from Spain to Israel to Mexico and back, plus conducting trainings in Ohio and Florida.

In Spain, PFC certified the country's first cannabis distributor, worked with a doctor's office, and conducted a weeklong training attended by representatives from 10 countries.

In Mexico, Dr. Marcu met with officials from the Department of Health and presented a talk on medical cannabis at the invitation of the national institute of pediatrics in Mexico

City. PFC is translating ASA's educational materials into Spanish and will be training the country's health officials through the Cannabis Care Certification program on how to draft and implement sound regulation. PFC has also been asked to work with the governor's office in Mexico City on drafting health and safety guidelines.

In Israel, Dr. Marcu made two presentations to Cann10, the second international medical cannabis conference in Tel Aviv. The focus there is on matching cannabis varieties to individual patients based on matching human genetics to plants. PFC's Cannabis Care Certification will be training physicians in Israel, and manufacturing companies there have applied to PFC for certification.

In the U.S., PFC has been offering webinars and in-person trainings, including a CME event in Orlando, Florida for health care professionals and a training in Ohio. Dr. Marcu was also invited to speak about the PFC program at the American Public Health Laboratory conference last month. He will be speaking about the endocannabinoid system this month at the Cannabis World Congress and Expo in New York and presenting on international cultivation standards this month as part of the annu-

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In the Senate, Dianne Feinstein (D-CA.) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA), leaders of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, last month introduced the Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act, a bill to support research on cannabis derivatives.

Safe Access Tennessee Goes Grassroots Groups



Americans for Safe Access has new membership opportunities for medical cannabis patient advocates in Tennessee.

A local ASA affiliate, Safe Access Tennessee, is now a full ASA Chapter with a dozen local political action groups spread across the state, including Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. The effort was led by David Hairston, Chairman of Safe Access Tennessee.

"This distribution means 93% of Tennesseans will be within a one-hour drive of meeting with fellow patient groups to plan political advocacy and enjoy the benefits of full membership in Americans for Safe Access," Hairston said.

That advocacy will be focused on getting a medical cannabis bill through the state legislature. State Representative Jeremy Faison (R, 11th District) and Senator Steve Dickerson, MD (R, Nashville) are sponsoring legislation that would create a comprehensive medical cannabis program.

Activist Profile: Nichole Miller, Virginia

Like many caregivers turned activists, Nichole Miller's journey to advocacy began with other people's stories. For Nichole, it was hearing about Paige Figi and her daughter Charlotte, another mother with a young child battling Dravet Syndrome who had turned to CBD-rich cannabis extract when pharmaceuticals failed.

But Nichole lived in Virginia, not Colorado.

Then in March, 2015, Virginia became one of more than a dozen states to pass highly restrictive laws that nonetheless provide for treatment of pediatric seizures. Other people began asking Nichole if she was considering cannabis extracts with her then four-year-old daughter.

Relative to other Dravet kids, Sophia was doing great, only experiencing violent tonic-clonic seizures every couple of weeks. Plus, Nichole wondered about cannabis side effects and hadn't yet heard real success stories personally. But with the change in law came the opportunity to look closer at whether cannabis might be a good option for her daughter.

The improvements in cognitive function others reported seeing in their children after beginning cannabis therapies convinced her. The turning point for the Miller family was when Sophia started to have a rough spell of chronic infections, with seven bouts of pneumonia in one year. With that, came an intensification of seizures that were difficult to control.



Nichole first obtained some CBD extract in June, 2015 and started Sophia in July at a dose of 0.75 milligrams per pound. The result was no seizures for three months. The CBD oil has reduced her violent convulsive seizures to less serious complex partial seizures that now often stop with the first dose of rescue medication. After starting CBD therapy, Sophia went eight months without an uncontrollable seizure and has remained stable since. But it was the hoped-for cognitive benefits that have been perhaps the most profound.

"Before we started, Sophia had a vocabulary of 15 to 20 words," Nichole remembers. "Now, I don't even count them. She could only manage two-word sentences before. Now they are three to four words, and she can answer abstract questions about stories we read."

Before, bright light would trigger seizures, so Sophia could never go outdoors without sunglasses. Now, at six, she no longer needs them.

Nichole's activism is focused on what made a difference for her own decision making: her child's dramatic improvement with cannabis. She participates in Facebook forums for Dravet parents and lobbies the legislature. She hopes to see Virginia expand its program to allow personal cultivation and dispensaries, so her family and others like hers will no longer have to break the law to obtain their medicine out of state. In the meantime, Nichole keeps telling people about Sophia's success.

Patients Protest Delays in Maryland



Delays to the Maryland medical cannabis program prompted dozens of medical cannabis patients and industry advocates, including ASA representatives, to stage a protest last month in front of a Baltimore courthouse, just as an appeals court step-ped in. The protest was held as the circuit court was reconsidering a restraining order that had just been issued to prevent the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (MMCC) from awarding any further licenses. Minutes before the hearing was to start, the Maryland Court of Appeals issued a stay of the restraining order, allowing the MMCC to resume licensing as the dispute is litigated.

To date, the commission has only issued one license to a medical cannabis business. Over 6,500 patients have registered so far. The restraining order was issued over allegations the MMCC discriminated against minority-owned businesses. To date, 15 companies have been pre-approved by the state, but none are led by African Americans.



"ASA would like to see the diversity of Maryland represented in the medical cannabis industry, but this should be accomplished without delaying the program further," said ASA Government Affairs Director Beth Collins. "Patients have waited four years for relief since the legislature approved the program."

ACTION ALERT: Urge your Senators to support CARERS!

With Attorney General Sessions signaling a return to medical cannabis raids and prosecutions, the time is now for Congress to act. That's why your Senators and Representative need to hear from you about the new CARERS Act of 2017 that would respect the rights of states to manage medical cannabis programs for their citizens. Take a minute to urge them to sign on as co-sponsors today! www.safeaccessnow.org/carers2017

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al meeting of the International Cannabinoid Research Society (ICRS), held this year in Montreal, Quebec.

PFC's role in developing regulatory guidance will be central, as Dr. Marcu is chairing the ASTM subcommittee of 50 experts developing standards for education and training and criteria for regulatory assessment. These standards will determine how the industry will function.

PFC's new partnership with the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy launches next week at PFctraining.org. This will be the only cannabis training program available through a university online for credit. Going forward, the University of Maryland will be conducting educational trainings, while PFC staff will handle regulatory issues and compliance.

PFC webinars are being run about every two weeks. Some are free, and those with fees are available to patients on a sliding scale. Interested patients should email PFC ahead of the webinar they'd like to attend.