Cannabis Prohibition Seen as Central to Racial Injustice

As Black Lives Matter protests have swept the world, federal and state lawmakers have begun to focus on the connection between the war on drugs and the disproportionate impacts of police misconduct on African-Americans.

A resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives not only condemns police brutality but specifically calls out the war on drugs as a source of racial injustice. House Resolution 988 notes that African Americans are far more likely than whites to face drug charges, despite rates of consumption being effectively the same. The resolution was introduced by Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D, MA-7) and currently has 173 cosponsors.

Essential Workers Get Free ASA Memberships

Cannabis businesses and workers have been deemed essential for serving patients during the COVID-19 restrictions, and Americans for Safe Access is saying thank you to them with FREE memberships to all that are working during this crisis.

“If your business is open, no matter what you do, you and your employees are welcome to sign up for our free membership,” said ASA Director Debbie Churgai.

ASA Offers Solution to Research Blockade

In response to proposed rules for expanding federally licensed cannabis cultivation for research, Americans for Safe Access is urging the creation of a new agency dedicated to cannabis regulation and oversight. On March 23, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) released proposed rules growing cannabis in bulk for research purposes.

Currently the U.S. has one farm operated by the National Institute on Drug Abuse which has been unable to meet the demand for pending medical studies. In 2016, the DEA announced it would issue more licenses, and 33 research institutions applied, but the government has taken no action.

ASA has submitted comments suggesting federal officials separate research activities from law enforcement agencies such as the DEA.

New business members last month include Florida Primary and Specialty Care, For the love of Charlie, Kannabis Works, KC Financial Services, Los Angeles Patients and Caregivers Group, Mindful Health, LLC, The Blind Leaf, Revision Wellness, RN4Wellness, The Cedar Group, Vireo Health, and Zen Leaf Dispensary.

Sign up at: safeaccessnow.org/covid-19_business or safeaccessnow.org/covid-19_employee.

Free Webinar June 18 on Extraction Analysis

PFC Director Heather Despres is presenting information for manufacturing operations on June 18 as part of the Science of Cannabis Extraction Online Symposium. Despres will explain Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and third-party certification and auditing as a tool for cannabis and hemp businesses.

Registration is free for this analytical chemistry webinar and the day-long symposium on topics in cannabis and hemp extraction. Register at science-cannabisextraction2020.vfairs.com.
Joy Grainge turned to medical cannabis after she injured her neck in 2006, developed spinal stenosis, and then discovered that she had arthritis throughout her body. That was eight years before Illinois, where she lives, got a medical cannabis program running, so she had to use the underground market for access.

She had used cannabis socially as a young person, but, like many people, by her early to mid-twenties she decided she was “an adult now” and adults don’t smoke, so she had stopped. Once that she needed to control her severe chronic pain, that view changed, and she immediately became involved in state politics.

Joy was a lone voice in her town of Homewood, a southern suburb of Chicago, but she connected with activists in the state capital of Springfield to lobby state lawmakers. She also found Americans for Safe Access, becoming a devoted volunteer for Chicago-area events, and in 2013 was an attendee at the inaugural National Unity conference, where she got a chance to lobby her federal representatives in Washington, D.C. Joy has been back to D.C. for several more Unity conferences, and volunteers with ASA regularly.

When Illinois enacted safe access for patients on January 1, 2014, Joy went to work with her city officials, meeting with the mayor and city council to get a dispensary approved. Again, she was a lone voice, but an effective one.

“Our mayor was very supportive, and most of the city council was open minded, “Joy says. “I think that they saw the benefit to not just the residents but the city in general.

The city approved the zoning for a dispensary, and Joy says “great folks came in.” For all that work and accomplishment, Joy still hesitated to enroll in the state program. She was concerned about what the impact of getting a medical cannabis card might be on her driver’s license, and she “had other options.”

By 2018, Joy’s concerns had been allayed by watching how the program rolled out, and she decided the benefits outweighed the risks and she registered with Illinois’ medical cannabis program.

Joy’s citizen lobbying has always been a combination of state, local and federal, but she’s also done outreach within her church.

“In 2018, I went to the Unitarian Universalist church conference in Kansas City with a big poster on cannabis and the Golden Rule,” Joy says. “People were encouraged and liked the compassionate aspect and diversion from jail - - it went really well.”

Since January 2020, when the Illinois legislature became the first to make access legal for everyone age 21, Joy has had difficulty finding the products she relies on to control her pain.

“The state has a supply problem now. Strains are unavailable and prices are up,” Joy says. “Many people think products are being held back for the rec market. I’ve had to do make.”

Joel lives in Naperville now, a more western suburb of Chicago, and remains very active, participating in the multi-state facebook group The Medical Cannabis Community and attending city council meetings to lobby them to allow more access. Illinois law allows municipalities to opt in or out of allowing cannabis sales.

“Locally, I work with Opt-In Naperville,” she says. “The city had been talking about an adult-use dispensary, but there has been lots of push back from council members and others who are part of the Opt Out movement.”

The Naperville city council place a referendum about the matter on the March primary ballot. It passed, but the measure was nonbinding. A majority of the council said they would follow the will of the voters, but they have yet to vote. The city has solicited public comment and will hold a workshop in two weeks.

“We do have a medical dispensary operating, and with COVID-19 they’ve been allowed to operate a drive-thru service, but a delivery service would be helpful,” Joy says. “I hope we get adult-use in town, and on-site consumption would be nice.”

Joy would like to see Illinois adopt a policy of allowing cannabis consumption anywhere tobacco smoking is allowed.

“I live where you can’t have it, so where am I supposed to go?” Joy asks. “I can’t be at home, can’t in my car, and can’t in public – that needs to be fixed.”

**Book on Patients Wins Prestigious Award**

The American Sociological Association has recognized a book coauthored by Michelle Newhart PhD and ASA’s William Dolphin with a prestigious award. *The Medicalization of Marijuana: Legitimacy, Stigma, and the Patient Experience* has won the Donald W. Light Award for the Applied or Public Practice of Medical Sociology. The book is based on a research study of patients in Colorado.

The committee said they were impressed by the book’s “in-depth look at patients’ experiences navigating the social, legal, and medical landscapes of medical marijuana use” and found the “research to be exceptionally timely, compelling, and comprehensive.”

Newhart and Dolphin did a webinar that can be seen at safeaccessnow.org/the_medicalization_of_marijuana_webinar. The book is available on Amazon and at routledge.com.