



Landmark MORE Act Reintroduced in House



On May 28, House Judiciary Committee Chair Jerry Nadler (D-NY) reintroduced the comprehensive cannabis reform bill that passed the House by a large margin last year but was blocked in the Senate by Republican leaders.

HR 3617, The Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act of 2021 (MORE Act), would harmonize federal law with state cannabis laws by descheduling cannabis. It would also fund cannabis research and institute criminal and social justice reforms, including expungement of cannabis-related convictions.

The new bill is largely the same as the one the House passed last year, but it includes more

provisions targeting the social justice problems created by 50 years of drug war. One change is that people with felony cannabis convictions would no longer be barred from receiving the proposed federal permits to work in the cannabis industry. Federal agencies would be barred from discriminating against medical cannabis patients who depend on social services.

The MORE Act would also create an Office of Cannabis Justice, and a tax on cannabis sales would fund an Opportunity Trust Fund that would pay for equity programs in communities disproportionately harmed by prohibition, including job training, health education and legal services. The Small Business Administration would be responsible for sup-

porting businesses and individuals adversely affected by the drug war.

Currently cannabis is still prohibited by federal law for all uses, but almost every state, the District of Columbia and two territories allow the medical use of cannabis or a low-THC derivative. With the latest action by Connecticut lawmakers, 18 states and DC also allow legal access to cannabis for all adults 21 or over.

Amazon Stops Most Cannabis Drug Testing, Will Lobby MORE Act

Amazon announced at the beginning of June that they will stop most pre-employment testing for cannabis and urged other employers to do the same. Applicants for positions that are regulated by the U.S. Department of Transportation, such as Amazon's pilots and drivers, will still have to pass drug tests.

Amazon also announced it will begin lobbying Congress for passage of the 2021 MORE Act, which would end federal prohibition by descheduling cannabis. In a statement, Amazon said their public policy team will be actively supporting the bill, which they noted "would legalize marijuana at the federal level, expunge criminal records, and invest in impacted communities. We hope that other employers will join us, and that policymakers will act swiftly to pass this law."

In a March 24 OpEd in The Hill, ASA urged the federal government to end its cannabis drug testing policy for federal employees and contractors.

"For years ASA has been pushing private employers and state and federal policymakers to end employment discrimination against patients who use cannabis," said ASA Executive Director Debbie Churgai. "Our No Patient Behind Campaign has been urging the federal government to change policy on this, and activists can still take action by sending an email to the federal Office of Personnel Management asking them to remove cannabis drug screening as a condition of federal employment."

Connecticut Lawmakers Pass Adult-Use Bill

On the 50th anniversary of President Richard Nixon launching the war on drugs, the Connecticut Senate passed Assembly Bill 1201, which allows adults 21 or older to cultivate, purchase and possess cannabis. The bill goes to Gov. Ned Lamont, who negotiated with state lawmakers on the bill's provisions and welcomed its passage in a statement.

"I look forward to signing the bill and moving beyond this terrible period of incarceration and injustice," Gov. Lamont's statement says.

Once signed, the law will go into effect July 1. Connecticut will license businesses to produce and sell cannabis products, which would begin sometime after May 2022. Until then, adults in

the state will be able to carry up to 1.5 ounces of cannabis, or have up to 5 ounces in a secured location, such as at home or in the trunk of a vehicle. Individuals will also be entitled to cultivate up to three mature and three immature cannabis plants.

Connecticut joins 18 other states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories in legalizing the nonmedical use of cannabis. The state enacted a medical access program in 2012. Research indicates that as many as half of cannabis consumers in those states are using cannabis to manage medical conditions, though they are not enrolled in medical use programs.

Texas Adds Conditions to Cannabis Program

In mid-June, Texas expanded the qualifying conditions for enrolling in its highly limited medical cannabis program to include PTSD and cancer. State lawmakers also increased the permissible amount of THC to 1% from 0.5%, but it remains effectively a CBD-only state.

Various provisions of House Bill 1535 that would have made a more meaningful difference -- including adding chronic pain and allowing up to 5% THC concentrations -- were lost in conference committee negotiations between the state senate and house.

PFC to Launch New Training Platform



ASA will soon be launching a new training platform. After many years of operation, the PFC training program has expanded so much and added so many new learners that it became necessary to upgrade to a more robust platform.

The new, friendlier interface will have more available curriculum and shorter, better-spaced tests. PFC is also adding some features behind the scenes that will make life easier for business clients who manage a team of learners. The new platform will be deploying very soon, so stay tuned for more information.

Activist Profile: Michelle Herman, Needham, Massachusetts

Already the mother of a young son, Michelle Herman was excited to discover she was pregnant with a girl. She'd had a girl's name, "Zoey," picked out since she was 13. She had no way to know that her daughter would inspire her to become a fierce advocate for medical cannabis.

Since Michelle had preeclampsia with her then-2-year-old son, who was born at 34 weeks, she decided to ask for an additional ultrasound. That's when her doctor informed her that the fetus was not as big as it should be, and there was something odd in the brain image. "Probably a smudge," the doctor told her.

Michelle and her husband, who she had met while living in Israel after college, went to Orlando to consult with a specialist. It wasn't a smudge. The diagnosis was thickened ventricles in the brain and hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. The doctor told Michelle it was no big deal. Her daughter would just need a stent to drain the fluid from her brain.

Michelle started doing research and decided to travel to Massachusetts to consult a leading expert at Boston Children's Hospital. His diagnosis was far more serious.

Imaging showed severe structural problems with Zoey's brain. She had structural problems with brain development linked to seizures and developmental delays. The problems were so significant, doctors told Michelle and her husband

that their daughter might never wake up after birth, or if she did, she would not be able to suck.

Michelle's blood pressure went through the roof. She had intended to stay in the Boston hospital to deliver Zoey, but the severity of the situation made her afraid not just for her baby but for her ability to make decisions about her.

The medical professionals seemed to think Michelle and her husband wouldn't be able to care for her.

Michelle and her husband and son returned to Florida. Zoey was delivered there via cesarean section and, to the delight of her parents, came out screaming. That was more than they were told to expect.

"It took three weeks to get her an MRI," Michelle remembers. "Our insurance wouldn't cover the type of imaging that might show what was going on, what to expect."

The answer was that Zoey would have developmental delays, autism and seizures. Michelle started looking at videos online of other families' experiences and came across Charlotte's Web, the CBD strain of cannabis that was being used in Colorado with kids with seizure disorders. The CNN medical special Weeds 2 had just come out, and Michelle decided they needed to know more.

Four months after Zoey's birth, they traveled to Colorado to meet with some of the families in Colorado Springs and Denver. They learned

quite a bit from the community of kids and parents, and came back asking when they could get cannabis medicine for their daughter in Florida. They had to wait six months just to get Zoey's condition assessed by the state.

"They told us to just take her home love her for as long as you have," Michelle says. "I asked for services and got suggested adoption."

The worry Michelle lived with was that once the seizures started, they might not stop. Michelle and her husband decided they needed to relocate. They had felt out of place in Colorado, so they decided to look at the coasts. When Zoey was 14 months old, they moved to Massachusetts.

"When we got there, immediately Zoey had occupational and speech therapy, we got an infant specialist, and I had a mothers' group," Michelle says. "We had to sign over our lives, but the town is amazing, and it's been just wonderful."

When Zoey was between 4 and 5, approaching the age at which seizures were expected to start, the Davids began giving her CBD. The effects were dramatic.

"She went from speaking 1 to 2 words to 4- to 5-word sentences," Michelle says. "She became a lot calmer, and the words started blossoming."

Now age 7, Zoey is still seizure-free and getting toilet trained. A long bureaucratic fight over mixed up applications has been resolved, and Zoey is finally getting her registry card.

Over the six years since moving there, Michelle has become a registered lobbyist and advocated with state lawmakers for program improvements. She started working with MassCann and the Massachusetts Patient Alliance, before she founded MassSense with Peter Bernard.

Michelle's focus is pediatric issues, with a goal of getting better definitions in state law and access to safe, tested, consistent medicine.

"I'm trying to build in as many skills and services as I can while I can," says Michelle. "I have this daughter who I love, but she's like a ticking timebomb. If we're lucky, we'll stave off the seizures that come with adolescence."

Michelle is also advocating for Massachusetts to help cover the cost of cannabis for those who need help. She wants the state to use program revenue to support cancer patients and people who need food, as well as address drug war impacts on local communities.

"As long as I have energy and time, I can be an advocate," says Michelle. "There are so many moms who go through what I have but can't do what I can because their kids need so much."



Action Alert: Urge Your Rep to Support the MORE Act

Now that the MORE Act has been reintroduced, support from House members is critically important. Take a minute today to urge your Representative to become a co-sponsor of this landmark legislation that would deschedule cannabis, open up research opportunities, and take important steps toward social justice.

It's easy to take action now. Just go to www.safeaccessnow.org/more2021

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