



Veterans Equal Access Amendment Vote Shows Progress



On the last day of April, Congress narrowly rejected a bipartisan budget amendment that would have allowed veterans to access medical cannabis with recommendations from their Veterans Health Administration (VHA) physicians. Currently, VHA policy bars physicians from providing the recommendations state programs require for participation.



Rep. Blumenauer

a situation where 213 million Americans live in states where they have access to medical marijuana, yet veterans are denied the ability to be helped by their VA primary care provider," said Blumenauer in a statement issued after the vote.

veterans to participate in state medical cannabis programs without being excluded from VHA care, but VHA doctors are still explicitly forbidden from providing recommendations. As a result, any veteran who qualifies for a state program must pay out of pocket for a private medical consultation. This effectively denies access to medical cannabis for veterans who rely solely on VHA healthcare.

The Veterans Equal Access Amendment (VEAA), introduced by Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) as the House considered the FY2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, failed on a vote of 210 in favor, 213 opposed. The identical bill when offered last year attracted 15 fewer votes, though it was then the most any medical cannabis legislation had received in the House.

"We were able to make the case publicly to members and their staff about the inequity of

Last week, the Appropriations Committee rejected the amendment, voting on party lines after committee Chair Hal Rogers (R-KY) organized opposition, but Representatives Blumenauer, Tom Reed (R-NY), and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), who are again sponsoring the measure, reintroduced it when the budget measure came to the floor.

The VEAA would have prevented the VHA from using any funds to punish physicians who write state-legal medical marijuana recommendations. VHA. Directive 2011-004 allows

Veterans are more likely to suffer from conditions that can be helped by cannabis, such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, neurological disorders, chronic pain, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Currently, 22 veterans commit suicide each day, and an estimated 25 million veterans live with chronic pain.

The bipartisan CARERS act, which has both Senate and House versions currently under consideration, would also lift the gag order on VHA doctors.

DEA HEAD RESIGNS AMID SEX SCANDAL

Michele Leonhart, administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), resigned in April. Her departure coincided with a government investigation that revealed DEA agents in Colombia attended sex parties sponsored by drug cartels and used federal funds to pay for prostitutes over more than a decade.

Leonhart has defied the Obama Administration's policies on medical cannabis and criticized the President publicly after he stated in an interview that cannabis is no more dangerous than alcohol. During a Congressional oversight hearing in 2012, Leonhart refused to state if she thought crack and heroin were more dangerous than cannabis.

Leonhart also opposed sentencing reforms embraced by the Obama Administration and other law enforcement agencies and worked to maintain cannabis' Schedule I status. She famously said that rising violence in Mexico was a sign of the drug war's success.

During Leonhart's tenure, the Obama Administration has spent over an average of \$180,000 a day interfering with state programs and conducted over 300 raids targeting qualified patients and providers.

New House Bill Would Recognize State Laws



A bipartisan bill introduced April 22 by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) would prevent the federal government from prosecuting individuals for marijuana crimes when they are in compliance with their state's laws. The Respect State Marijuana Laws Act of 2015 (H.R. 1940), cosponsored by five other Republicans and six Democrats, mirrors a bill Rohrabacher offered in 2013.

"The American people, through the 35 states that have liberalized laws banning either medical marijuana, marijuana in general, or cannabinoid oils, have made it clear that federal enforcers should stay out of their personal lives," Rohrabacher said in a statement.

Rohrabacher also sponsored the successful bipartisan amendment to a federal spending bill that currently prohibits the Department of Justice from using funds to interfere in state medical cannabis programs. The DOJ has said the measure does not restrain them from prosecuting individuals who are in compliance with state law. The congressman sent a letter to the Attorney General's office declaring the DOJ's interpretation of the law "emphatically wrong."

The new bill would amend the Controlled Substances Act to create an exception to federal law for anyone authorized to use, possess or distribute cannabis under state law.

Washington State Undermines Patient Access



Washington State's long-standing medical cannabis program has been changed. A new law, SB 5052, purports to harmonize that program with the state's new market for recreational pot,

The law creates a voluntary registry for patients, eliminates collective gardens that serve more than four patients, and will require patients to buy medicine at recreational marijuana stores that get an endorsement to sell medical cannabis.

Those who have been operating large collective gardens may get priority in obtaining new licenses. Patients who are accepted into the new registry can possess three times more cannabis than recreational users and cultivate six plants at home. Registered patients can also possess 48 ounces of cannabis-infused solids, 216 ounces of liquid and 21 grams of concentrates. Patients who do not register can still cultivate up to three plants, but they can only possess the recreational limit of a single ounce of usable medicine.

Action Group of the Year: Pennsylvania Campaign for Compassion

PA The Pennsylvania Campaign for Compassion was honored with an ASA Excellence Award for outstanding action group at this year's National Unity Conference.

Campaign for Compassion was founded by a number of dedicated parents fighting for safe and legal access to medical cannabis for all. The initial organizing took place soon after CNN's first special on medical cannabis aired in 2013. Several moms whose children suffer from the types of seizure disorders featured in the special found each other on social media. The campaign quick-



ly expanded to include veterans and others seeking safe access. The group's closed Facebook page for sharing information now has more than 1,500 subscribers.

The group's lobbying efforts began with a visit by one of the founders, Dana Ulrich, to the office of her state Senator, Republican Mike Folmer. Folmer surprised her by saying he was already a supporter, but he still needed convincing to sponsor legislation. Ulrich provided the senator with a packet of materials on medical cannabis at that Friday meeting. On Monday, he contacted her to say he had stayed up all night studying the issue and was now on board. Sen. Folmer is now a passionate supporter of safe access and a cosponsor of Senate Bill 3, which is advancing in the Assembly.

Pennsylvania Bill Clears Senate Committee

PA A bipartisan medical cannabis bill has cleared a key Pennsylvania state Senate committee, with a full Senate vote expected early this month. Senate Bill 3 passed out of the Government Committee by a unanimous vote of 10-0. The committee is chaired by one of the bill's sponsors, Republican Sen. Mike Folmer, who was a special guest at ASA's National Unity Conference and Lobby Day in March.

In the last session of the Pennsylvania state legislature, a medical cannabis bill passed the full

Senate 43-7 but did not clear the state House. The Senate Government Committee made changes to bill to address House concerns, and more changes are expected before it goes to the floor of the Senate.

Governor Tom Wolf has expressed his support for medical cannabis legislation in the past, and his press secretary said, "The governor believes we should not deny doctor-recommended treatment that could help people suffering from seizures or cancer patients affected by chemotherapy,"

The Campaign for Compassion has held numerous education and lobby days. Some members of the state Assembly have urged them to accept a limited, CBD-only bill similar to those that have passed more than a dozen states, but the group is steadfast in seeking a medical cannabis law that allows vaporizing whole-plant medicines and lets physicians decide which conditions medical cannabis may be effective treating.

"We believe everyone deserves a better life, and no one should be left behind," said Ulrich. The Pennsylvania Campaign for Compassion's next lobby day is scheduled for May 12. Find out more at the group's website: www.campaign4compassion.com.

New York Has 30-Day Window for Applications

NY The New York state Department of Health is now taking applications for businesses seeking licenses to cultivate and distribute medical cannabis, but interested parties have only 30 days to complete them. Each of the five selected cultivators will be authorized to also operate up to four dispensaries for distributing medical cannabis products to registered patients. New York limits

cannabis medicines to only non-combustion delivery methods. Applicants for cultivation and distribution licenses must submit detailed plans about their operations and pay both a non-refundable \$10,000 application fee and a \$200,000 registration fee. The registration fee will be refunded if the applicant is not accepted. An 18-month clock on implementing New York's medical cannabis law began July 7.

ASA California Citizen Lobby Day June 14-15

CA Registration is now open for ASA's California Citizen Lobby Day, June 14-15, in 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 medical 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 our annual medical cannabis lobby day in the state legislature. The bill's introduction is a clear example of direct grassroots action making a real difference in the political process and the lives of patients.

Register today and ASA will make an appointment for you to meet with you state Assembly Member and Senator. The requested donation for the lobby day is just \$25, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

ACTION ALERT: Tell President Obama to Fix the DEA

Tell President Obama he should select a replacement to head the Drug Enforcement Administration who, as he told CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta, "follows the science as opposed to ideology." Urge the President to set a new course for the DEA today at www.SafeAccessNow.org/new_dea.

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