



Medical Cannabis Protections Renewed by Congress



The restrictions on federal interference with state medical cannabis programs have been renewed by Congress with the passage of the government funding bill. Good through September 30, 2017, the appropriations bill includes an amendment barring the Department of Justice (DOJ) from expending federal funds to prevent the implementation of state medical cannabis programs, which courts have said includes prosecutions or civil actions targeting patients or providers.

This is the third year Congress has placed such restrictions on federal prosecutors. Because it is part of an annual budget bill, the amend-

ment must be renewed annually to remain in force. The 2017 bill also includes protections for states with industrial hemp programs.

First introduced in 2003 by Reps. Dana Rohrabacher (R, CA48) and Maurice Hinchey (D, NY22), the amendment was defeated half a dozen times before it passed the House attached to the 2015 budget bill. It passed again the following year with Rep. Sam Farr (D, CA20) joining Rep. Rohrabacher as co-sponsor. The 2017 amendment introduced by Representatives Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) provides patients more certainty regarding access to their medicine over the summer.

"Congress is to be commended for extending protections for patients, but in the fall patients will again have to worry about being prosecuted for following their doctor's advice," said ASA Government Affairs Director Beth Collins. "Legislation must be passed that provides patients permanent protections and safe access to their medicine."

California Releases Draft Regulations



Late last month, California officials released 211 pages of proposed regulations for the medical cannabis industry. Public comment is being accepted and hearings will be held throughout the state over the next 45 days.

"The proposed licensing regulations for medical cannabis are the result of countless hours of research, stakeholder outreach, informational sessions and pre-regulatory meetings all across the state," said Lori Ajax, chief of the Bureau of Medical Cannabis Regulation. "And while we have done quite a bit of work and heard from thousands of people, there is still so much more to do."

Twenty years after voters approved medical cannabis, state lawmakers enacted a comprehensive regulatory scheme for the state, the Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act, scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2018.

Overseen by the Bureau of Medical Cannabis Regulation, responsibility for drafting the rules was split between three state agencies. Regulations for distributors, transporters, laboratories and retailers are in a 58-page document, while the Department of Public Health released 95 pages of rules for companies that manufacture cannabis products, and the Department of Food and Agriculture covered cannabis cultivators. Rules for laboratory analysis of cannabis products are due out at the beginning of May. A cannabis advisory committee is being put together by the bureau to provide input on final regulations.

The regulations address everything from child-resistant packaging to how to track cannabis products from seed to sale. Businesses operating by Jan. 2, 2018 would have a six-month grace period so long as they have a pending license application.

Indiana Governor Signs CBD Bill



On Apr 27, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb signed a bill into law that allows cannabidiol (CBD) extracts to be used in the treatment of epilepsy in the state. Originally Gov. Holcomb opposed HB 1148 but changed his position after it passed the state Senate 36-13 and the state House unanimously.

"This does not put us on a slippery slope to legalizing marijuana, quite the contrary." Holcomb told the press, crediting his change of

heart to the testimony of patients and parents who appeared at legislative hearings.

Indiana legislators have considered similar bills for the past seven years. The bill they finally passed allows state residents diagnosed with uncontrollable seizures, and their caregivers, to register with the state program to use CBD oil.

Registration provides an affirmative defense. There is no provision for the production of the extracts or patient access.

Wisconsin Enacts New CBD Law



Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin last month signed a bill, SB 10, that allows cannabidiol (CBD) extracts to be used in the treatment of seizures. Possession and use of CBD extracts will be protected, but the production or sale of CBD remains illegal.

The new law, which passed the Assembly 98-0, comes as the result of years of lobbying by the parents of children with intractable seizure dis-

orders. Passage of the measure, sponsored by Republican Sens. Van Wanggaard and Scott Krug, comes after a similar bill they sponsored failed to advance last session.

The senators say they are working with House Speaker Paul Ryan on federal solutions.

A broader bill called the Compassionate Cannabis Care Act that would have allowed use of more medical cannabis products by more patients failed to advance this year.

Mexico Passes Medical Marijuana Bill



The lower house of Mexico's legislature on a vote of 374-7 passed a bill allowing medicinal use of cannabis. The bill, which was previously passed by the Senate, awaits the signature of President Enrique Pena Nieto to become law. The bill, which directs the Health Department to "design public policies to regu-

late the medicinal use of this plant and its derivatives," represents the latest step in an evolving policy. For the last year, the government has issued permits allowing a limited number of patients them to import select medicinal cannabis products and others to cultivate and possess medical cannabis for their own use. The new bill would also legalize hemp.

ASA Activist Profile: David Hairston, Nashville, Tennessee

David Hairston's career as a high-powered CPA for a leading international accounting firm ended four years ago when he became disabled with psoriatic arthritis. As a type-A executive who was used to working at the top level of international mergers and acquisitions, David had a big adjustment to make when he got sick. Stating, "learning to accept the practical realities of being disabled was his hardest life lesson."

David tried everything to control his symptoms, from yoga to acupuncture to three Vicodin a day. But nothing controlled the pain adequately. After researching medical cannabis carefully, he decided to try it.

A self-describe conservative Republican, he says it was important to "be as legal as I could." That meant flying from his home in Nashville to Portland, Oregon, where you did not have to be a state resident to register with the state's medical cannabis program. He knew from his research that, as he says, "cannabis really helps with inflammatory autoimmune diseases" such as his, but what happened in Portland convinced him.

"I had a good experience," he says. "I finally had some relief." Even with the cannabis, David still has trouble walking, but the quality of his life is better thanks to the pain control he now gets.

That Oregon registration card, which he had for two years, gave him reciprocity in Michigan. That meant making a 425-mile trip from home to obtain his medicine. With the legal changes in Oregon, David lost his legal



Sebastien Cotte (left) and David Hairston on Capitol Hill for ASA's Lobby Day at the 2017 Unity Conference

access in January and is now applying for a Maryland card. As he considered how to change the laws in his own state of Tennessee, he looked for expert allies.

"I wanted to see who the real players are in the field, and I was instantly drawn to ASA," David says. "The organization speaks to the core of my values."

He helped form the ASA affiliate Safe Access Tennessee in August 2015 with fellow board members who are mothers of epileptic children. David describes their efforts as "triage for the casualties of the war on drugs" in which they try to get state legislation that will help the most in need.

They thought they were going to pass legislation last session with the help of State Senators Dr. Steve Dickerson (R, district 20) and Jeremy Faison (R, district 11) but were stopped by lobbying from the drug testing industry.

"Next year we should be successful," David says. "We've got a full plan to win Medical Freedom for patients in Tennessee."

David has been crisscrossing the state having conversations with stakeholders and building a grassroots constituency. ASA action groups or chapters are being planned for Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga.

"Victory is inevitable," David says.

ASA National Unity Conference a Success

As every year, the culmination of ASA's National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference last month was a day of citizen lobbying on Capitol Hill. Over 100 medical cannabis patient advocates from 32 states met with the offices of their members of Congress, urging them to support medical cannabis legislation such as the CARERS Act. With help from ASA staff, advocates attended 72 scheduled meetings equipped with the information they had learned at ASA's conference.

Held from the 7th-11th at the Omni Shoreham hotel in Washington, D.C., the conference keynote speaker, South Carolina State Senator Tom Davis, inspired the audience with his commitment to passing legislation for patients in his state. Sen. Davis was honored as Elected Official of the Year at ASA's awards dinner.

The conference included panels and workshops led by leading global experts, such as Dr. Ethan Russo. Sessions covered the latest developments in medical cannabis research, treatments, policy, regulations, and advocacy, as well as international developments. Many participants also attend Patient Focused Certification trainings, advocacy workshops, and learned about ASA's newest educational program for doctors and patients, Cannabis Care Certification.

ASTM OKs Cannabis Standards Work

The 119-year-old standards organization ASTM International has approved the formation of a cannabis committee for developing standards. ASTM's board of directors approved Committee D37, a group that will hold its first full meeting June 11.

ASA's Patient Focused Certification program was invited to provide input at the preliminary meeting in March. PFC and ASA are working with ASTM in developing standards for areas such as personnel training, laboratory testing, cultivation and processing. PFC and American Herbal Products Association developed standards in 2010 that have already been adopted by 19 states and are now integral for medical cannabis programs in the United States.

ACTION ALERT: Support Federal Protections, Join ASA!

Victories such as the restrictions on interference with medical cannabis programs that Congress just renewed are thanks to the work of ASA and other advocates. Your support is crucial to those successes. If you're not a member, join today. If you are, recruit a friend or family member. This can be the year that comprehensive federal protections become permanent. Visit <http://safeaccessnow.org/donate> and make a contribution to change today.

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