

For Immediate Release: May 9th, 2006

LA County Victory on Medical Marijuana

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LA County Reaffirms Medical Marijuana Dispensary Ordinance & Votes to Implement State ID Card Program

Los Angeles, CA – Today, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved two pieces of medical marijuana legislation that will help improve safe access for patients throughout the County. The Board voted in favor of an ordinance to regulate medical cannabis dispensing collectives (dispensaries) in unincorporated LA County and voted to move forward with the state Medical Marijuana ID Card Program. Los Angeles County joins with 3 other counties and 24 cities in California to establish guidelines and regulations governing dispensaries; and is the 22nd County to implement the State's Medical Marijuana ID Card Program. Dozens of patients and advocates in attendance applauded the Board for taking action.

Patient-advocates with Americans for Safe Access (ASA), the nation's largest medical marijuana advocacy group, were pleased with the day's proceedings. "This is a victory for patients and a solid step towards countywide implementation of Proposition 215 and SB-420, California's medical cannabis laws," said Amanda Brazel, Los Angeles County Field Coordinator for ASA. "LA County is leading the way now. This puts the nation's most populous county ahead of the curve on medical cannabis."

The popular ordinance requires safety protocols and allows for on-site consumption of medication. The ordinance also allows dispensaries to provide patients with cannabis plant cuttings to grow at home – a move that advocates say will save money and help make legal patients self-sufficient. The Board made a small change to the ordinance requiring dispensaries to obtain a full conditional use permit. This will result in a longer permitting process, especially when a permit decision is appealed.

Los Angeles County will join twenty-one other California counties in issuing the Medical Marijuana ID Card this summer, part of a statewide program mandated by the State Assembly in 2004 (SB-420). The cards will assist law enforcement in identifying medical marijuana patients, although the ID cards are voluntary for patients.

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Americans for Safe Access (www.safeaccessnow.org) is the nation's largest organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research.

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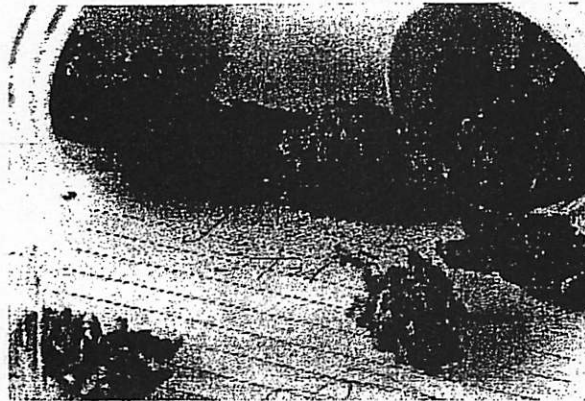
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Los Angeles medical marijuana making news



The editors at USA Today love Los Angeles. Either that, or they have realized that the word 'marijuana' in a mainstream newspaper draws eyes. Bet the latter.

This time they start off with Rev. Scott Imler. Imler helped write and pass Prop 215 in 1996, making medical marijuana a reality in California. Today Imler is not so enthusiastic about the law.

Imler told USA Today, "What we set out to do was put something in the statutes that said medicine was a defense in case they got arrested using marijuana for medical reasons," Imler says. "What we got was a whole different thing, a big new industry."

The expectation that Prop 215 was to be used only as a legal defense is absurd.

The Compassionate Use Act of 1996 states: The people of the State of California hereby find and declare that the purposes of the Compassionate Use Act of 1996 are in part:

(A) To ensure that seriously ill **Californians have the right to obtain and use marijuana for medical purposes** where that medical use is deemed appropriate and has been recommended by a physician who has determined that the persons health would benefit from the use of marijuana in the treatment of cancer, anorexia, AIDS, chronic pain, spasticity, glaucoma, arthritis, migraine or any other illness for which marijuana provides relief.

(B) To ensure that patients and their primary caregivers who **obtain** and use marijuana for medical purposes upon the recommendation of a physician are not subject to criminal prosecution or sanction.

(C) To encourage the federal and state governments to **implement a plan for the safe and affordable distribution of marijuana to all patients in medical need of marijuana.**

With the rising cost of chemical pharmaceuticals, many patients are now opting for herbal medications like marijuana. And if they are going to use marijuana as a medicine, patients must be able to obtain it in a safe manner.

This should not be unexpected.

USA Today also interviews reactionist LAPD Chief William Bratton. Bratton shows us how leaders single out marijuana for special treatment in public policy.

"The stores are accused of selling to people who don't have health issues or doctors' notes and of raking in huge profits. In essence, some drug dealers may have gone legit, police say."

Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton says it's time to crack down. He has asked the City Council to impose a moratorium on new pot stores and to impose restrictions on hours, location and how they operate.



In a report to the Board of Police Commissioners late last year, Bratton said

"the spirit and intent of this act has been exploited and abused for both profit and recreational drug abuse by many of the medical marijuana dispensaries."

Chief Bratton is right. Medical marijuana has been and will be exploited by those with no medical need. But any substance that causes a change in the body or mind has a potential for profit and recreational use if those changes are pleasant.

This is the case for countless medications!

More Americans exploit and abuse the prescription system than smoke marijuana. But Bratton will not propose a crackdown on Rite-Aids or Wal-Greens.

What is missing from the data is evidence that the nearly 200 marijuana facilities in Los Angeles are causing problems in the community. That data is missing because it does not exist.

A few marijuana facilities have been victims of crime, but the reefer madness that Bratton is alluding to exists only in the minds of a few prohibitionists. The biggest danger at the dispensaries is the threat of dozens of amped-up narcotics agents treating granny like Pablo Escobar.

Anyone who has spent much time in dispensaries knows that these articles are nothing more than partially-erect hit pieces. These writers must go to the facility just long enough to snap a few pictures and grab a quote or two. If they stayed any longer, they would see that the people lined up to obtain medicine are the same lawyers, teachers, and businesspeople that buy the USA Today.

The complete article follows:

L.A.'s marijuana stores take root**By William M. Welch, USA TODAY**

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — A decade ago, the Rev. Scott Imler co-wrote and organized the ballot initiative that made California the first state to legalize marijuana for medical use.

Now Imler shakes his head with dismay over what his law has wrought: scores of storefront marijuana shops across Southern California with menus of pot varieties for sale to anyone with a doctor's note.

"What we set out to do was put something in the statutes that said medicine was a defense in case they got arrested using marijuana for medical reasons," Imler says. "What we got was a whole different thing, a big new industry."

'Dispensaries' boom

Los Angeles has become a boomtown for pot stores. The number of "dispensaries" as they are known has gone from four in late 2005 to 98 one year later, according to the Los Angeles Police Department.

It all started in 1996 when California voters passed Proposition 215, which legalized the growing and possession of marijuana for medical use. Supporters such as the marijuana-legalization group NORML pushed for the law, saying smoking pot lessens pain and alleviates nausea of serious illnesses.

Cooperatives sprung up, permitted under the law to receive "reasonable compensation" for the distribution of their product. Then stores opened, which in Los Angeles can sell up to a half-pound of pot to an individual.

None of this is legal under federal law, and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) recently raided several stores in January in West Hollywood, hauling away thousands of pounds of pot and hundreds of plants.

"It's really become a way of skirting the law for the recreational use of marijuana," Los Angeles police Lt. Paul Vernon says.

Stores that sell marijuana are touted in Los Angeles' alternative newspapers and on the Internet. Ads also offer doctors who will write a legal "recommendation" that a patient needs pot for ailments as common as headaches and depression. In online reviews, users discuss the merits of varieties with names such as "Mountain High," "Purple Haze," and "Gold Kush," at prices of up to \$80 for one-eighth ounce.

The stores are accused of selling to people who don't have health issues or doctors' notes and of raking in huge profits. In essence, some drug dealers may have gone legit, police say.

Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton says it's time to crack down. He has asked the City Council to impose a moratorium on new pot stores and to impose restrictions on hours, location and how they operate.

In a report to the Board of Police Commissioners late last year, Bratton said "the spirit and intent of this act has been exploited and abused for both profit and recreational drug abuse by many of the medical marijuana dispensaries." He said crime and complaints have surrounded some of the stores, including open smoking of marijuana on nearby streets and targeting school students with store advertising fliers.

In an effort to beat an anticipated crackdown, more stores have sprung up. Four dozen

opened in the past few months, Vernon estimates. He says L.A. now has 140 pot stores, some close to schools.

'More about intimidation'

In Los Angeles County there are around 200 stores, DEA special agent Sarah Pullen estimates, far more than in the San Francisco area to the north. She says all of them are breaking federal law.

After the DEA raid in January, some of the targeted stores have reopened. The raids have prompted protests.

"This is more about intimidation on the part of DEA than actually enforcing laws," says Steph Sherer, executive director of Americans for Safe Access.

"Even if there are abuses, what happens if you are told you have cancer and have to start chemotherapy next week? Do you know where to find marijuana?" she says.

Ten other states allow medical marijuana, but none is as permissive as California's law, Sherer says. The intent, Imler says, was to provide a risk-free, no-hassle way for people with real medical needs for marijuana to grow or obtain it without fear of arrest.

In West Hollywood, one of the most liberal communities in the state, cops take a hands-off policy "unless there are people around there complaining," says Deputy John Klaus of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's West Hollywood division.

Now pastor at Crescent Heights United Methodist Church in West Hollywood, Imler, 49, moved here from Northern California in 1995 to help organize the medical-marijuana-ballot movement. He says he used marijuana first to counter severe seizures from a head injury, and later when he developed cancer.

He organized a marijuana collective that was shut down by federal agents in 2001. He was arrested and received one year probation. Cancer-free, he says he stopped using marijuana. But he worries that the state will pull back from its commitment to medical marijuana if people abuse the law.

"I was pretty na?ve," he says [sic]. "I thought people would act in good faith."

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