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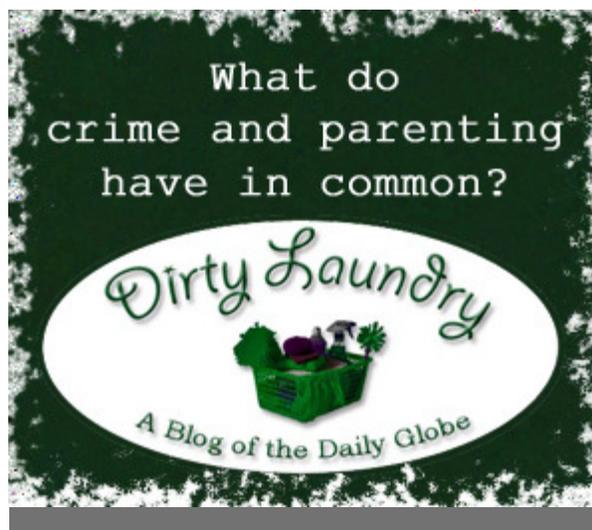
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Medical marijuana gets thumbs-down from local law enforcement

[Justine Wettschreck](#) **Worthington Daily Globe**

Published Friday, March 20, 2009



WORTHINGTON — The subject tends to bring out passion in many people, and the argument has been going on for years —

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should marijuana be legalized for medical purposes in Minnesota?

Recently, Worthington Public Safety Director Mike Cumiskey and Nobles County Sheriff Kent Wilkening added their names in support of a document written by Dakota County Attorney Jim Backstrom opposing medical marijuana.

“The organizations that represent Minnesota’s law enforcement professionals strongly oppose adoption of a law legalizing marijuana for medical purposes,” the document states. “While Minnesota’s law enforcers have great compassion for persons suffering from cancer, AIDS, MS and other serious diseases, this proposal is not limited to these patients.”

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2007-2008 session, but was never brought up for a vote on the House floor.

If the current bill does pass, Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who has said he remains firmly opposed to it, is expected to veto it.

The bill

The bill would provide regulation of the medical use of marijuana by setting limits for allowable amounts of the drug. Qualifying patients and caregivers would possess registry identification cards, which would be issued by the Commissioner of Health. The bill would also authorize registered organizations to grow and supply marijuana to patients and caregivers.

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A patient would be allowed to have 2.5 ounces of usable marijuana, and caregivers would be allowed 2.5 ounces per patient. A registered organization would be allowed up to 12 plants and 2.5 ounces of usable marijuana and any amount of other parts of the plants for each patient.

The opposition

“This is very problematic for law enforcement and the way we enforcement drug laws,” Wilkening stated. “Check in California and see the problems they’re having out there.”

Wilkening believes that people would take advantage of the bill to possess marijuana, even if it wasn’t medically necessary.

The concerns raised by law enforcement are many. They believe the bill allows for the growing of far more marijuana than a legitimate patient would need for medical purposes.

“Excess quantities create incentive for drug ‘rip-off’ robberies and organized crime involvement,” Backstrom wrote.

The lack of law enforcement oversight is a concern, as is the lack of a limit on the number of medical marijuana grow operations.

“Thousands of individuals or organizations could legally cultivate significant quantities of marijuana, worth huge sums of money if illegally sold on the streets, in their homes or backyards, placing the safety of themselves and their neighbors in jeopardy,” Backstrom stated. “Medical marijuana outlets could show up on street corners throughout Minnesota, as they do now in California.”

In short, he added, the bill is an ill-conceived and overly broad proposal filled with problems.

The use of marijuana has not been endorsed by the major medical organizations representing the groups of patients proponents say need it the most, such as the American Cancer Society, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, Backstrom claims in his document. The Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Society of Addiction Medicine also oppose the passage of the law.

“The bottom line is that marijuana is a dangerous and addictive illegal drug. It is ranked as a Schedule I controlled substance, meaning it is illegal to sell and possess under both federal and state law,” Backstrom concluded. “Legalizing marijuana for medical purposes sends a message to our children that it is safe to use when it is clearly not.”

The support

There are several organizations dedicated to the legalization of marijuana, and not just for medical purposes. While a mental picture of Dorito-eating, High Times- toting potheads wearing shirts plastered with the likeness of Bob Marley may come to mind, there are legitimate organizations whose purpose is to push for drug policy reform and an end to “drug prohibition.”

At www.stopthedrugwar.org, an article about the current state of the bill in Minnesota has comments about the legalization of medical marijuana that range all over the spectrum.

“Sane, rational people choose to be compassionate and allow (the sick) to pursue what ever treatment they and there doctor deem appropriate,” one person wrote.

“Dude, that is like WAY cool,” commented another.

Some comments include angry words for Pawlenty, and a familiar cry: “What people want to do in there own home on their own time is their business.”

The pros and the cons

At ProCon.org, a list of the top 10 pros and cons of medical marijuana was compiled, with quotes from doctors, medical associations and researchers chiming in on both sides of the issue.

On the pro side, a former U.S. surgeon general states, “The evidence is overwhelming that marijuana can relieve certain types of pain, nausea, vomiting and other symptoms caused by illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and AIDS — or by the harsh drugs used to treat them.”

In the con column, a former U.S. senator wrote, “Based on current evidence, I believe that marijuana is a dangerous drug and that there are less dangerous medicines offering the same relief from pain and other medical symptoms.”

While the American Public Health Association urges Congress to move expeditiously to make cannabis available as a legal medicine, the American Medical Association calls for further controlled studies and recommends that marijuana retain its Schedule 1 status.

A DEA administrative law judge stated, “The evidence...clearly shows marijuana has been accepted as capable of relieving the distress of great numbers of very ill people, and doing so

safely under medical supervision.”

Yet, the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy stated, “Smoked marijuana damages the brain, heart, lungs and immune system. It impairs learning and interferes with memory, perception and judgment. Smoked marijuana contains cancer-causing compounds and has been implicated in a high percentage of automobile crashes and workplace accidents.”

For more information, visit www.medicalmarijuana.procon.org.

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