

Home > [Local News](#)

Sides split over medical marijuana bill

Comments 0 | Recommend 0
May 30, 2009 9:53 PM

By LAURA GRIFFITH
The Telegraph

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the first in a two-part series regarding pending legislation on the legalization of medical marijuana in Illinois.*

As the legalization of medical marijuana in Illinois comes closer to reality, law enforcement agencies continue to maintain their opposition.

Senate Bill 1381, which passed the Illinois Senate on Wednesday by a vote of 30-28, also passed the House Health and Human Services Committee on Thursday and is expected to move to a floor vote.

Advocates such as Bruce Mirken, of the nationwide Marijuana Policy Project, hope that the bill will come to a vote and be on the governor's desk by the end of the General Assembly's current session, which is scheduled for today but could be extended.

If medical marijuana becomes legal, suffering patients who seek to use it for medical purposes won't have to break the law in order to get it, said state Sen. William Haine, D-Alton, who sponsored the Senate bill.

"It's an idea whose time has come. I will never sponsor a bill that I don't personally believe in. This bill is reasonable," said Haine, who comes from a conservative family and a background in law. "This bill will enhance the common good."

Haine said his constituents are generally aware of what's going on in Springfield and are quick to voice their opinions if they feel strongly either way.

"I've gotten a few letters against it, but more for it," Haine said. "I've received not a lot of mail on the subject, which means the majority of people really don't care."

As a former Madison County state's attorney, Haine is tuned into the concerns posed by law enforcement and knew the obstacles he could face in sponsoring the bill.

"I love a challenge," he said.

Although an Illinois House committee passed a similar medical marijuana measure earlier in the year, the Senate version included a number of amendments to tighten restrictions, Haine's response to those concerns.

While Haine said local law enforcement entities appreciate the measures he's taken, as of Thursday, most remained officially opposed.

Jersey County State's Attorney Ben Goetten declined to comment specifically on the legislation or its possible ramifications, but he issued the following statement:

"As a prosecutor, it is my duty to follow the law and hold those accountable for breaking it. I would like to say I not only respect Sen. Haine, but I trust in his judgment. Proponents of this bill could not have chosen a more capable sponsor. Sen. Haine's legislative experience, coupled with his law enforcement background and common sense, exponentially increase the likelihood that this bill will be successful."

Not everyone sounds so positive.

Illinois State Police have opposed the bill in part because they lack a way to measure impairment. Haine added an amendment removing the right of medical marijuana users to drive while under the influence and increased

Print Story | E-Mail Story | Font Size

Other Articles in this Category

- [Pipeline promises prosperity](#)
3 hours & 22 minutes ago
- [NEW: Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics founder, dies](#)
8 minutes ago
- [Hanging up the helmet](#)
- [Man accused of selling cocaine in bar](#)
- [True cost may derail high-speed push](#)

Most Viewed Stories

- [Man accused of selling cocaine in bar](#)
- [Pipeline promises prosperity](#)
- [Hanging up the helmet](#)
- [Underwater drilling among biggest challenges of pipeline](#)
- [Quinn uses private cell phone for work](#)

Most Commented Stories

Most Recommended Stories

Save & Share this Article [What is this?](#)

- Digg
- Google
- StumbleUpon
- del.icio.us
- Facebook
- Newsvine
- Reddit
- Slashdot

Alton **Yellow Pages**

75.0°F
Overcast and 75.0°F
Winds North at 9.2 MPH (8 KT)
Last Update: 2009-08-11 09:20:35

[Click Here for More Weather](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Things to do

Events Dining Venues

Featured Events

[Event Listings](#)

[Click for More Events](#) [Add Your Events](#)

Find an Event

what when where

Publish Your Stuff

Log In Join Now Explore

you photos blogs forums explore

ADVERTISEMENT

Poll

Poll of the week

Cash for Clunkers: good or bad for the economy?

Good

Bad

I don't know / no opinion

Enter The Code To Vote

0758c

the oversight of dispensers and the penalties on those who sell marijuana illegally.

Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz couldn't speak on behalf of all law enforcement officials but said he opposes the legislation personally.

"Specifically myself, I'm dead against it," he said. "What's next? Cocaine? Meth?"

Hertz worries that marijuana would be hard to control once an authorized person gets possession of it.

Like other prescription drugs, there is a chance that someone outside of the patient who holds the prescription could come into possession of it.

"Hopefully, (the bill) will have enough oversight to it, making certain those who are supposed to be entitled to it are the only ones getting it," he said.

Haine said he thinks the restrictions will help prevent abuse. He also said that drug dealers will suffer because patients in need of the drug no longer will be forced to turn to their illegal sources.

Hertz said he also worries about the message legalization would send to children.

"I could see some kids thinking, 'Well, if it's OK for people who are in pain and suffering, it could be good for me,'" Hertz said. "Marijuana use leads to use of other illegal drugs. I just think it sends the wrong signal to youth."

Hertz said he and a handful of other law enforcement officials approached Haine months ago and indicated their displeasure with the bill.

"I don't think that you'll find many law enforcement professionals (who support this)," he said. "I would think that they would have better things to do in Springfield in light of what's going on instead of spending any time on this subject. My guess is the majority of people would not be supportive."

Despite his stance on this issue, Hertz describes himself as a humanitarian and said nobody should have to live in pain.

"With the way medical technology is today, they can develop a drug that can have the same effect, assuming what they say about medical marijuana is accurate," he said.

In fact, that drug already exists in the form of a tablet called Marinol, synthetic THC.

Doctors throughout the area and state have varying opinions on whether Marinol is enough or whether the legalization of medical marijuana would present another viable treatment option.

laura_griffith@thetelegraph.com

MORE ON THE WEB

Marijuana Policy Project - <http://www.mpp.org>

NORML - <http://www.norml.org>

ProCon.org Medical Marijuana debate - <http://medicalmarijuana.procon.org/>

Educating Voices, Inc. - <http://www.educatingvoices.org/>

[See archived 'Local News' stories »](#)

Reader Comments

From the editor: Many of you have expressed concerns about some of the harsh anonymous comments from readers. To remedy that, we are introducing new features. You can create your own blog, publish your news and share your photos with the community. Once you fill out a simple form and leave a verifiable e-mail address, you can set up your profile page. It will display all of your contributions and allow you to track issues and easily connect with others.

We want our site to be a place where people discuss and debate ideas that foster stronger communities. We built this for you. Please take care of it. Tolerate broad thinking, but take action against obscene or hateful material. Make it a credible and safe place worth preserving and sharing.

[Oldest First](#) | [Newest First](#)

Search:

[Web](#) [Site](#)

[Search](#)

powered by

Advertising Info

[Place a Classified Ad](#)
[Advertise with Us](#)
[Today's Print Ad's](#)

Reader Services

[About Us](#)
[RSS Feeds](#)
[NIE](#)
[Newsletters/Alerts](#)

Related Sites

[Telegraph Varsity](#)
[Land of Lincoln](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Telegraph Carmall](#)
[Freedom Politics](#)

Help

[Contact Us](#)
[Site Map](#)

Sponsored Links

[Simmons-Cooper LLC](#)
[Features](#)
[Coupons](#)

Copyright © 2007

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Advertising Info](#) | [Business Listings](#) | [Site Map](#)

