

**Medical Marijuana****Lawmakers may approve marijuana bill**

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Would enable patients to get medical marijuana

Updated: Wednesday, 10 Jun 2009, 9:45 PM EDT  
Published : Tuesday, 09 Jun 2009, 5:35 PM EDT

Nancy Krause

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) - A bill that would allow nonprofit stores in Rhode Island to sell marijuana to medical patients is headed to the governor's desk. The state Senate passed the bill Tuesday afternoon by a 30-2 margin.

The bill has already passed the House and now heads to Governor Donald Carcieri for approval. The governor vetoed similar legislation last year.

If it becomes law, the bill would allow so-called compassion centers to sell marijuana to registered patients with debilitating illnesses. Right now, 680 patients are registered with the Department of Health's medical marijuana program.

State lawmakers approved the use of medical marijuana in 2006, however they never legalized the sale of the drug. Under the current bill, Rhode Island would be the third state in the country and the first on the East Coast to approve marijuana dispensaries for medical patients.

"Sick patients and their caregivers shouldn't have to risk their safety and deal with criminals to get the relief they need," said bill sponsor Senator Rhoda Perry (D-Dist. 3, Providence). "Rhode Island was compassionate enough a few years ago to recognize the benefit of marijuana for those who are suffering, and I'm proud that we're now taking the next logical and necessary step and recognizing that patients need a safe, legal means to get it."

Governor Carcieri has a week to either sign the legislation or veto it. If he does nothing, the bill will automatically become law without his signature. The legislation passed each chamber with significantly more than the three-fifths majority necessary to override a veto.

In the US, fourteen states have recognized medical marijuana: Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington; although California is currently the only state to utilize "dispensaries" to sell medical cannabis. There are currently five other US states considering medical marijuana bills in their state legislatures: Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey and New York. South Dakota also has several petitions in interest of medical marijuana legalization.

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