

Representative Sponsors Resolution to Legalize Marijuana

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Floridians suffering from illnesses that cause chronic pain and appetite loss may find relief if a bill legalizing medical marijuana is passed.

Rep. Jeff Clemens (D-Lake Worth) is sponsoring House Joint Resolution 1407 that would allow Floridians to vote on the legalization of medical marijuana.

HJR 1407 is the first bill to propose the legalization of medical cannabis or marijuana in Florida's history.

On March 10, Clemens held a press conference with his co-sponsors, Rep. Rick Kriseman (D-St. Petersburg), and Rep. Mark Pafford (D-West Palm Beach), at the state capitol to introduce HJR 1407. Rep. Dwight Bullard (D-Miami) also co-sponsors the bill but was not present at the press conference.

"There is no good reason for us to allow people to use synthetic drugs like Oxycontin, Methodone, Percocet, and Prozac, but ban them from using a natural, safer drug," Clemens said. "Study after study has shown that the use of medicinal cannabis can help those suffering from debilitating diseases. Who could be against that?"

"To me it makes absolutely no sense that we would not allow people to use a safer drug, something that helps with their issues, yet doesn't cause all the problems that some of those prescription narcotics cause," said Clemens.

The amendment, if passed, would appear on the 2012 ballot for the residents of Florida to put to a vote.

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia allow the legal use of medical marijuana, according to the non-profit, think-tank Procon.org. In a recent poll conducted by Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates, a Republican firm that worked with Rick Scott's gubernatorial campaign, 57 percent of Floridians support the legalization of medical marijuana. The language of HJR 1407 calls for 60 percent of voters to approve the amendment.

Bradley Rogers, a graduating pharmacy student from Detroit, supports the use of medical marijuana in extreme cases where regular narcotics do not help the patient. "Medical marijuana is great for pain management and stimulating appetite. There are cases where regular narcotics do not help patients. They are too sick to eat and their pain is unbearable, in those cases I would encourage them to use medical marijuana."

"I am in support of medical marijuana because it helps terminally-ill cancer patients deal with the pain," said Marie Davis, an employee at Syn-tech, a fuel management company in Tallahassee. "If the patient is terminally-ill we should exhaust all avenues to improve their quality of life, however long or short it may be." If some of the hype was taken off of how illegal it is, may be there wouldn't be such a demand for it. Also, I believe if the state proposed it correctly, profit from marijuana would help the economy either by taxes of some sort or licensing to grow."

Other residents are unconvinced that medical marijuana is the answer regardless of the benefits.

"With the only knowledge I possess being that of a drug that kills brain cells, I am opposed to the legalization of marijuana," said Angel Rios Jr., a French and Spanish teacher at Rickards High school. "As a high school teacher, I have seen first hand the effects that this drug can have on the life of the individual using it and those around them.

Rios does not think the law is necessarily positive.

"Based on that, I don't think it is our job to find ways to make people feel better if it comes at a cost of other body functions being affected beyond repair," said Rios.