

NEWS RELEASE: Cannabis Legislation Proposed

Inspired by Arkansas State Senator Randy Lavery, a Democrat from Jasper whose outspoken endorsement of marijuana decriminalization as a proactive response to Arkansas' overcrowded jails drew a flurry of media attention late last year, an ad-hoc group of self-titled 'civic activists' have been meeting monthly since January with the objective of being part of the solution.

"We agree with the Senator, that it is time for a strong dose of honesty and sanity in the drug-war issue," said one of the group's proponents who asked not to be identified fearing that the social stigma attached to discussing the subject openly could have seriously negative consequence on her at work. "Because really, this is a much bigger issue than just marijuana use or how many people we are willing to pay for to lock up in prisons. This is really about how we treat sick people like they were violent criminals. It is reprehensible and it must stop."

Enter the "Arkansas Medicinal Cannabis Act of 2011." A proposed Bill drafted by the aforementioned activists and now being circulated for public comment by the group's spokesperson, Robert Reed. The objective of which, according to Reed, is to enable the medicinal use of cannabis by people who choose to use it for personal therapeutic benefit and to free those who choose such therapeutic use from the fear and penalty of interdiction.

"We compiled the structure of the legislation from a comprehensive review of legislation that has been enacted in other states," said Reed, who has prior legislative experience as the former chairman of the Arkansas Libertarian Party during their successful "Ax the Tax" campaign of 2006. "We looked at things that seemed to be working and we looked at problems other states are having. All along the way, we measured every word of the legislation with one standard: How does this enable the individual who so chooses to provide for self or readily procure the medicinal benefit of cannabis for therapeutic use?"

And it would seem that the tide of both public and legal opinion is steadily building support for the science, morality, and economics engulfing the issue.

The medical community has for decades unofficially recognized the therapeutic benefits of medicinal cannabis. Prior to prohibitions beginning in 1937, most major pharmaceutical companies legally sold products containing natural cannabinoids (a group of substances related to tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) produced by the cannabis plant) as over-the-counter remedies much like aspirin.

Even since prohibition, there has been mounting scientific evidence that cannabinoids possess a variety of medicinal properties. As a result, the American Medical Association (AMA) has now taken the position that cannabis

should be removed from the DEA's Schedule Two drug list.

At the federal level, current policy now declares that federal authorities will no longer interdict cannabis users, dispensaries or clinics that are in compliance with their own state laws concerning the medical use of cannabis, even though current federal law still carries criminal penalties for use, sale or possession of marijuana whether medically prescribed or not.

"Over the past fifty years, pharmaceutical companies have spent hundreds of billions of dollars trying to develop a 'non-addictive' pain medication that poses no risk of serious side effects," said Reed. "Among other things, cannabis is that medication for many people and their right to use cannabis as medicine must be respected."

For more information, a PDF of the proposed legislation is posted at http://www.gozarks.com/pdf/med_cannabis_act_2011_050811.pdf or visit Arkansans for Medical Cannabis on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Arkansans-For-Medical-Cannabis/406969176256> or contact Robert Reed, a4mc@gmx.com ~~~