



Massachusetts
Patient Advocacy
Alliance

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Advocating for safe access to medical marijuana.

June 17, 2014

Newton Land Use Committee

*In Support of a Special Permit for Garden Remedies Dispensary
Testimony of Matthew J. Allen
Executive Director, Massachusetts Patient Advocacy Alliance*

BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Patient Advocacy Alliance (MPAA) is a coalition of medical marijuana patients, their family members, medical professionals, and public health groups advocating for safe access to medical marijuana for patients with a doctor's recommendation. MPAA backed the 2012 medical marijuana ballot initiative, and has since been working to ensure that patients have a voice in implementation.

MPAA represents patients in Newton suffering from multiple sclerosis, severe chronic pain, cancer, and other serious illnesses who have voiced the need for a medical marijuana dispensary in the community, so that they can safely access their medicine.

STATE REGULATIONS

The medical marijuana law in Massachusetts includes extensive controls at the state level in order to relieve municipalities from the burden of regulating the day to day operations of registered marijuana dispensaries (RMDs). Patients must:

- obtain a recommendation from a doctor with whom they have a bona fide patient-physician relationship,
- register with the state and receive a state issued identification card,
- renew the recommendation and card annually.

The state Department of Public Health is required to:

- verify doctors' recommendations,
- maintain a database of all patients who have received and doctors who have written recommendations,
- license no more than five dispensaries per county in the in the first round of registrations, meaning no community will host more than one dispensary.



RMDs are required to:

- follow strict security plans including state-of-the-art video surveillance,
- track inventory from seed to sale,
- admit only patients with a recommendation that has been verified by the state,
- limit how much medicine they provide to each patient,
- prohibit on site consumption of medical marijuana.

As an extra measure to prevent abuse of the system, the law created a new felony for anyone who defrauds the medical marijuana system for profit.

LOCAL REGULATIONS

The experience of other states has demonstrated that when well regulated, dispensaries offer a needed resource to patients while having a positive impact on communities. Dispensaries function more effectively when local authorities and dispensary operators work together to address any community concerns.

Newton already passed amendment 309-13, which authorizes the Board of Aldermen to take a role in regulating any dispensaries that locate in town. Local regulations include;

- establishing a special permitting process,
- restricting RMDs to locate in business 2 and 5 or mixed use 1 zones, and at least 500 feet from schools,
- requiring RMDs to submit information about traffic impact and other specifications.

This creates accountability and sets benchmarks that create a structure for the RMD operator, community, and Board of Aldermen to measure the ongoing impact of the dispensary, so that any unexpected consequences can be quickly addressed.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND YOUTH USE

Studies on public safety: Because of strict security measures that are required, well regulated dispensaries increase public safety in the vicinity.

- A 2010 study commissioned by the Los Angeles Police (LAPD) found that banks are more likely to get robbed than dispensaries and that the claim that dispensaries attract crime "Does not bear out," according to the LAPD chief.¹

¹ <http://www.dailynews.com/20100117/lapd-chief-pot-clinics-not-plagued-by-crime>



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- A 2012 UCLA study found that dispensaries do not attract crime.²
- A 2014 study by the University of Colorado found dispensaries have the same impact on neighborhoods as coffee shops, and that residents do not perceive a dispensary as an undesirable use of a storefront.³

Studies on youth rates of use:

- A recent study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that medical marijuana laws do not increase youth use.⁴ A 2011 a Harvard study came to the same conclusion.⁵

IN SUPPORT OF A SPECIAL PERMIT FOR GARDEN REMEDIES

Given the multiple levels of regulations already in place and the need for safe access to medical marijuana for Newton residents currently suffering with serious conditions such as cancer, MS, ALS, and severe chronic pain, MPAA supports a special permit being issued for Garden Remedies dispensary.

MPAA is not only a patient advocacy organization, but also a clearinghouse for information related to medical marijuana policies. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are seeking any additional information about the issue. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Matthew Allen
Executive Director
Massachusetts Patient Advocacy Alliance

² <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2012/06/06/report-medical-marijuana-dispensaries-not-linked-to-neighborhood-crime>

³ http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2014/02/medical_marijuana_dispensaries_denver_neighborhoods_impact.php

⁴ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/04/140423102754.htm>

⁵ http://catalyst.harvard.edu/pdf/chirp/Medical_Marijuana_Report.pdf