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Local Medical Marijuana Patient/Advocate urges Illinois lawmakers to pass bill

COULTERVILLE- As the General Assembly breaks for the spring holiday season, a Coulterville medical marijuana patient is one of many around Illinois urging lawmakers to pass the bill to protect seriously ill people like her from arrest for using doctorrecommended medical marijuana.

Gretchen Steele, a registered nurse who has found medical marijuana effective at treating the debilitating symptoms of her seven-year battle with multiple sclerosis, is available to television, print and radio outlets to tell her personal story and how legal medical marijuana protection would improve her life.

For the first time ever, both chambers of the General Assembly are considering medical marijuana bills. According to a recent poll conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, Illinois residents favor allowing seriously and terminally ill patients to use marijuana for medical purposes by a 68-27 percent margin.

Most medical professionals also agree on the need for legal protection for medical marijuana patients and their doctors. Last month, the American College of Physicians – the second largest U.S. medical association representing 124,000 physicians – issued a policy paper calling for legal protection for medical marijuana patients and for the federal government to respect the will of voters in states with medical marijuana laws.

Illinois could become the 13th state to protect its sick and dying from arrest for using medical marijuana with a doctor's recommendation – and the first in the Midwest. Similar legislation is currently under consideration in Minnesota and New York, and voters in Michigan will likely see a

medical marijuana initiative on their November ballot.

A flyer written by Steele and distributed to members of the General Assembly is included below this advisory for additional information. Members of the media may get contact information for Steele from Dan Bernath, (202) 462-5747, ext. 115.

With more than 23,000 members and 180,000 e-mail subscribers nationwide, the Marijuana Policy Project is the largest marijuana policy reform organization in the United States. MPP believes that the best way to minimize the harm associated with marijuana is to regulate marijuana in a manner similar to alcohol. For more information, please visit www.MarijuanaPolicy.org.

In a letter sent to legislators Steele writes " I am not a criminal - I am sick."

Steele's letter as it was sent to legislators appears below:


Seven years ago, I was diagnosed with MS. As a registered nurse for most of my life, I thought I knew what I was in for; however, nothing could have prepared me for the uncontrollable muscle spasms and pain that have since become part of my daily life.

To treat my symptoms, my physicians have prescribed me a myriad of medications, including powerful narcotics that can leave me debilitated, physically addicted, and with a damaged liver and kidneys - which will then require even more medications. I have found marijuana to be a much more effective, safe, and economical treatment for my symptoms.

I find it utterly ridiculous that, while my physicians can legally prescribe any number of powerful and addictive narcotics, many of which have side effects that require additional medications to manage, they cannot recommend that I use marijuana. Medical decisions regarding my treatment should be left up to my doctor and me, not the police and prosecutors.

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 First Day Story