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Medical cannabis may be legalized in Illinois

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Posted: 3/18/08

In a decision on March 5, the Senate Public Health Committee voted 6-4 in favor of allowing the medical use of marijuana to become legal for those with debilitating diseases.

If the law is passed, those with illnesses such as glaucoma, cancer and AIDS could potentially benefit by relieving some of their symptoms through use of the plant.

However, similar legislation was approved by the committee last year and voted down by the Senate in its third reading.

"The one [bill] that I am the most confident in passing is Senate Bill 2865, which would allow patients in Illinois with their doctor's recommendation [to] medicate with cannabis," Dan Linn, executive director of the Illinois chapter of the National Organization to Reform Marijuana Laws (NORML), said.

According to Linn, Senate Bill 2865 would allow for patients to grow up to eight plants and possess two and a half ounces of cannabis at a time and would also allow for caregivers to do so for the patients.

"...The bill does allow a 'medical marijuana organization' to be the primary caregiver for a patient and that organization would be able to provide medicine for as many patients as are registered for that 'medical marijuana organization' as their caregiver," Linn said.

Such an organization would be required to pay a fee and register with the Department of Public Health, according to Linn.

"The wasting syndrome associated with HIV/AIDS can be alleviated by using cannabis and the effects of chemotherapy can also be reduced," Linn explained. "The stereotypical 'munchies' are vital for those who cannot stomach the food needed to survive."

The current legislation would carry harsher penalties than simple marijuana possession for those who abuse the medical cannabis program.

"The new bill clearly defines the guidelines for the Department of Public Health to implement a medical cannabis program," Linn said.

Contrary to published reports, a branch of the State Police Department never implemented the law when it was originally passed 30 years ago, according to Kimberly Parker, a Public Health Department spokesperson, said.

"Our agency was never [involved] in the statute," Parker said when referring to the 1978 Cannabis Control Act.

The current bill will be sent to the Illinois Senate floor on April 1.

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