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Education and retraining needed for better medical marijuana understanding in Michigan (viewpoint)

Published: Friday, October 28, 2011, 5:57 AM

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The Michigan Medical Marijuana Act works. Patients are experiencing relief they've never felt before, finding a better quality of life through the benefits of medical marijuana.

Why, then, does Attorney General Bill Schuette and members of Michigan's House of Representatives and Senate, want to overregulate the act, make access to medicine difficult and even provide sensitive patient medical information to Michigan State Police?

The proposed bills in the Michigan House and Senate are aimed at rendering the act essentially useless. While the current act provides protections for patients and is written in the spirit of helping Michigan residents, new regulations will eliminate many of those protections and subject patients to discrimination and potential police profiling.

One bill even goes as far as to give the state immunity when it comes to treatment of patients, an egregious addition that refuses to make municipalities accountable for their actions.

I have personally witnessed the law work. The parents of a 6-year old girl and medical marijuana patient with brain cancer finally able to provide comfort to their daughter from pain and suffering when nothing else will work.

A man with skin cancer finding relief and improvement in his condition through the utilization of a medical marijuana derivative cream.

I have also seen egregious violations of human rights related to the law. A 30-year old individual and licensed caregiver who calls police to report a possible break-in at his home and is subsequently arrested and thrown in jail, the plants he was cultivating for licensed patients taken away and destroyed. Senseless home raids and invasions of

law-abiding citizens where the scenarios are the same: arrest now and ask questions later. In each instance, the cases are ultimately thrown out and yet the damage - to medicine for sick individuals and to reputations - is done.

If the state of Michigan, and its residents who overwhelmingly approved the act, want to take action on medical marijuana, it should think about re-education and training for law enforcement. Too often, patients are arrested and charged with crimes while in compliance with the law because of obsolete police training and a lack of education on medical marijuana.

Beyond education and re-training, both sides would benefit greatly from a medical marijuana summit, a forum featuring leaders from each community to address concerns and create a safer environment for patients and law enforcement. This was done in a small capacity when I met with state representatives on behalf of the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association for a positive discussion, leaving both sides with a better understanding and appreciation of the act.

The people of Michigan have already spoken, approving medical marijuana for use in this state. Our representatives in Lansing and law enforcement officials statewide need to listen to the people, and can start by sitting down with patients, caregivers and supporters of the act.

Michael Komorn is a Southfield attorney and board member of the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association.

http://www.mlive.com/opinion/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2011/10/education_and_retraining_neede.html