

Medical marijuana advocates rally at state Capitol

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Rick Thompson of Oak Park stood at the top of the steps of Michigan's State Capitol Wednesday and surveyed the sea of medical marijuana advocates shouting below him.

“This is the truest expression of democracy there ever could be,” said Thompson, editor of Michigan Medical Marijuana Magazine.

“People are here to let Lansing know that their vote counts.”

An estimated 2,000 medical marijuana supporters turned out for a rally, organized by the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association. Speakers took turns encouraging the crowd, many of whom carried signs. One read, “My vote (about medical marijuana) didn’t count!? I’ll remember that come November.” Another said, “We’re not going back into the closet.”

Many speakers alluded to Attorney General Bill Schuette, who is proposing a raft of changes to the Medical Marijuana Act, which passed by a 63 percent majority in 2008. One sign read, “Schame on Schuette.” When a plane flew over dragging a sign reading, “Schuette: Keep Patients off the Streets,” the crowd roared with approval. Over near the entrance to the rally people were collecting signatures on petitions to recall GOP Gov. Rick Snyder. “It’s been steady,” said one of the workers.

The lunch-hour rally was held on state legislators’ first day back to work after summer break. This fall, legislators will decide if they wish to tackle 16 medical marijuana-related bills. Medical marijuana advocates argue the original initiative to allow marijuana usage by seriously debilitated people should be left alone.

Lately, state courts have been issuing rulings to tighten regulations on how and when the drug is used.

One speaker, the Rev. Steve Thompson, dressed in a colorful tie-dyed shirt, prayed for the legislators and thanked God for marijuana and then told the audience to find out who their state representative is and write or call them.

“Tell them enough is enough,” he shouted.

Patient advocate Joe Cain stepped to the microphone and said, “They forgot who we are. We are the people.” Michael Huggler of Okemos watched the rally from a wheelchair. “I have a problem walking,” he said. “I have hemophilia and am HIV positive. Marijuana relieves pain and helps me sleep.” He said the rally was to let legislators know they were doing the “wrong thing. They’re changing (the act) to suit themselves. Hopefully they’ll listen to us. If they don’t, we’ll have to vote them out of office and get people in to support what we want.”

Southfield attorney Michael Komorn spoke at length to the crowd, noting the bills before the Legislature do “nothing to implement the intent of the (medical marijuana) law.”