

# Volume of applications delays issuing of medical marijuana cards to patients **WITH VIDEO**

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Michigan receives an average of 400 to 600 applications every day from people who want to become registered medical marijuana patients.

On one particularly busy day, just shy of 2,000 people applied.

The large number of requests, coupled with the hundreds of calls and emails received, is a key reason why people applying for a medical marijuana cards in Michigan face a roughly 3 1/2 to 4 month delay, according to a state official.

One local attorney says the delay, which he heard can be as long as six months, is unacceptable.

“It’s been a tremendous disappointment the way the state has handled the registry program,” said Michael Komorn, an Oakland County attorney and president of the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association.

CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO:

<http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2011/10/06/news/doc4e8cca2a431e7585929748.txt?viewmode=fullstory>

Michigan voters in 2008 approved a ballot proposal that included physician-approved use of marijuana by registered patients with debilitating medical conditions and allowed registered individuals to grow limited amounts of marijuana for patients.

When the state began issuing medical marijuana cards in April 2009, a staff of three people processed the applications. There were 1,100 applications that first month.

Now, a staff of 25 is on hand to handle an increasing number of applications. In August 2011, 13,215 applications were received.

The medical marijuana registry program is within the Bureau of Health Professions at the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs.

Celeste Clarkson, manager of the compliance section of the Bureau of Health Professions, said the delay is in the issuance and printing of the registry cards.

Under the Michigan Medical Marihuana Act, the state must approve or deny an application within 15 calendar days of receiving it. The state has five additional days to issue a card after approving an application.

“That’s where we’re behind,” Clarkson said.

If a denial letter is not received, the application is deemed valid. The statute allows for a copy of the application submitted to serve as a valid registry identification if the card is not issued within 20 days of its submission to the department.

“Our delay is based on sheer numbers, volume,” Clarkson said.

She said along with a large number of applications and related inquiries, staff members are busy following up with people who turned in incomplete applications, conducting background checks on prospective caregivers

and handling many other tasks.

Clarkson said in the case of a licensed profession, such as nursing, state officials know how many people are in nursing schools and can figure that a certain percentage of those will go on to seek a license.

However, medical marijuana is different because there's no way to estimate how many people are going to apply to be registered patients. Clarkson said staffing levels are always being reevaluated.

"How do you determine how much staff you need when you have an unknown application base?" Clarkson said.

Komorn said there have been cases in which a person has shown a police officer a copy of their application because they haven't received a card yet and the officer, believing that the actual card is required, has arrested the person.

Komorn said he understands the state was overwhelmed with applications in the beginning.

"Now, as we move into the third year, (the delay) is inexcusable, and steps could have been taken a long time ago," he said. "Because they haven't ... it tells the community and the voters that they're not serious about implementing this program."

When people send in an application to be a registered medical marijuana user, they can choose to designate a caregiver who can legally provide them with marijuana. A caregiver relationship with a patient has to originate with the patient's application.

According to state officials, from October 2010 through August 2011, the state's Medical Marijuana Program expended more than \$1.5 million, though that figure doesn't necessarily include all expenses related to it. A further breakdown was not immediately available.

Clarkson said from October 2010 through July 2011, \$8 million came into the state through registry application fees. She said that figure does not include instances of checks being returned for insufficient funds or any refunds the state has issued for various reasons, such as to people who have sent in multiple applications.

From April 2009 through early September of this year, the state received 181,303 original and renewal applications. More than 105,000 patient registrations have been issued.

Fifty-seven registered medical marijuana patients in Michigan are younger than 18.

There are about 11,145 registered medical marijuana users who have listed an address in Oakland County.