

DEA Attacks on Medical Marijuana Patients, Caregivers, and Providers

It's Time to Stop the Madness

At dawn on Sept. 5, 2002, Suzanne Pfeil of Santa Cruz, California awoke to find five U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents pointing automatic rifles at her head. Pfeil, paralyzed and in constant pain from post-polio syndrome, is one of hundreds of thousands of Americans who find relief from medical marijuana, recommended by their doctors legally under the laws of 12 states. Pfeil also serves on the board of the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM), a patient-run group that grows medical marijuana and provides it free of charge to its members, most of whom have deadly illnesses such as cancer and AIDS.

When the DEA agents screamed, "Put your hands in the air and stand up," Pfeil pointed to her wheelchair and braces and explained that she physically could not. The agents handcuffed her and left her on the bed while they ransacked WAMM's premises and arrested its founders, Valerie and Mike Corral.

These attacks on the sick are continuing and even increasing.

In June and July 2007, the DEA conducted extensive medical marijuana raids in several California counties and in Oregon, including raids on at least 10 Los Angeles sites in late July. Most were aimed at medical marijuana dispensaries operating legally under state and local laws, and in several cases individual patients were detained and terrorized.

Recently, the DEA also began threatening the owners of buildings used for medical marijuana activities with seizure of their property. Called "a deplorable new bullying tactic" by the *Los Angeles Times*, this DEA action has occurred *even where medical marijuana is legal under state law and specifically authorized by voters.*

DEA attacks are preventing effective local regulation of medical marijuana.

Cities and counties in California are passing ordinances to ensure that medical marijuana dispensaries follow the law and serve patients properly. By treating all who provide medical marijuana to the sick as common drug dealers, the DEA has become the single largest obstacle to effective regulation of these establishments. A major Los Angeles raid actually occurred *at the exact moment that members of the city council were holding a press conference to discuss an ordinance to regulate medical marijuana providers.* At a Coachella Valley Association of Governments meeting in January, Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom O'Brien even threatened officials with prosecution for aiding and abetting a federal crime if they acted to regulate medical marijuana dispensaries.

Local officials and major newspapers are outraged by the DEA's actions.

After the July 2007 raids in Los Angeles, L.A. City Councilman Dennis Zine — a Republican and former police officer with the LAPD — said, "I am greatly disturbed that the Drug Enforcement Administration would initiate an enforcement action against medical marijuana facilities in the



P.O. Box 77492, Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. 20013

Phone: 202-462-5747 Fax: 202-232-0442 www.mpp.org info@mpp.org

City of Los Angeles during a news conference regarding City Council support of an Interim Control Ordinance to regulate all facilities within the City. This action by the DEA is contrary to the vote of Californians who overwhelmingly voted to support medicinal marijuana use by those facing serious and life threatening illnesses. The DEA needs to focus their attention and enforcement action on the illegal drug dealers who are terrorizing communities in Los Angeles.”

After a series of DEA medical marijuana raids in San Francisco, the city’s health director, Dr. Mitchell Katz, wrote to the Senate Judiciary Committee, “These actions have resulted in 4,000 persons with chronic illness left without access to critical treatment upon which they rely. Certainly in this post-September 11 environment, it seems that a DEA priority punishing organizations for distributing cannabis for medical purposes to chronically ill individuals is misplaced.”

On August 3, 2007, the *Los Angeles Daily News* editorialized, “In recent days, the DEA has cranked up its raids in a clear assault on the state’s medical marijuana law ... But the feds should leave medical marijuana alone unless they have proof of genuine abuses. Surely, heroin, cocaine and meth pose a greater threat to society.”

Scientific research supports medical marijuana.

In March 1999, the Institute of Medicine issued a White House-commissioned report stating, “Nausea, appetite loss, pain and anxiety are all afflictions of wasting, and all can be mitigated by marijuana,” and that for some patients with chronic illness, “there is no clear alternative.” Federal officials have ignored this finding, prompting co-author Dr. John A. Benson to tell *The New York Times* in April 2006 that the government “loves to ignore our report ... They would rather it never happened.”

Since then, research has further documented marijuana’s medicinal benefits and safety. A study published in 2005 in the *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* found that, of patients suffering moderate to severe nausea from their anti-HIV drugs, those who used marijuana were 3.3 times more likely to take their pills than those not using marijuana — of critical importance, as medication adherence has been linked to increased survival. A similar study of hepatitis C patients in 2006 linked marijuana use to both improved treatment adherence and a 300% improvement in cure rates. Other research has shown that marijuana can control types of pain that don’t respond to conventional drugs. A University of California at San Francisco study published in February 2007 found marijuana effective at relieving a type of nerve pain that afflicts about one-third of persons with HIV/AIDS, for which there are no FDA-approved drugs.

Medical organizations supporting legal access to medical marijuana include the American Public Health Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of HIV Medicine, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the state medical societies of New York, California, and Rhode Island, and many others.

Doctors and the public support medical marijuana.

A June 2005 HCD Research/Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion poll of U.S. office-based physicians found that 74% of doctors disagree with the statement that “the federal government should be able to prosecute those who use, grow, or obtain marijuana prescribed or recommended by their doctor for chronic pain within the guidelines of state law.” A 2005 Gallup poll found that 78% of Americans support “making marijuana legally available for doctors to prescribe in order to reduce pain and suffering.” A 2004 AARP poll found 72% support for medical marijuana among older Americans. These polls consistently show support crossing all ages, ethnic groups, and party affiliations.

**There is no constituency that supports
arresting suffering patients for using medical marijuana.**