



# Well-Regulated Medical Marijuana Laws Do Not Cause Public Safety Problems

In the early 2000s, the General Accounting Office (the investigative arm of Congress, now called the Government Accountability Office) interviewed officials from 37 law enforcement agencies in four states with medical marijuana laws. A key issue they examined was whether those laws had interfered with enforcement of laws regarding nonmedical use. According to the GAO's report, the majority of these officials "indicated that medical marijuana laws had had little impact on their law enforcement activities." Since then, the data has continued to accumulate, showing that medical cannabis laws do not cause public safety problems.

Several studies have shown that medical marijuana laws and medical marijuana dispensaries are not associated with increased crime. In 2012, a study published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* found, "Density of medical marijuana dispensaries was not associated with violent or property crime rates."<sup>[1]</sup> In 2014, a study published in PLoS One found that the passage of laws are "not predictive of higher crime rates and may be related to reductions in rates of homicide and assault."<sup>[2]</sup> In 2017, researchers published their analysis of more than 20 years of crime data and reported that neither dispensaries nor medical cannabis laws resulted in increased crime rates."<sup>[3]</sup>

In states with medical marijuana laws, it is not uncommon for law enforcement to initially be wary or opposed to the proposal. However, once those laws are implemented, even previously opposed law enforcement officials often recognize the laws do not cause problems. In July 2006, Vermont released a report that included a statewide survey of law enforcement, including state's attorneys, to determine the effect of the 2004 medical marijuana law on drug enforcement. They found that "[n]one of the state's attorneys thought that the law had made it more difficult to enforce drug laws."

By 2007, Vermont's head law enforcement official publicly recognized that the law had not caused problems, despite his initial misgivings. Four years later, in 2011, Vermont Department of Public Safety Commissioner Keith Flynn testified in favor of adding a regulated dispensary program to Vermont's law. The bill passed, and dispensaries began operating in 2013. The state's program administrator was interviewed about the dispensaries and explained the few complaints she'd heard of were from patients with concerns about access, not from the general public.

Law enforcement organizations that had opposed medical marijuana bills in other states — such as Illinois and Minnesota — also came to see the laws did not cause problems once they were implemented.

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**Law Enforcement Support for Allowing Medical Marijuana and Statements Explaining the**

## Laws Are Not Causing Problems

### **Dennis Flaherty, Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association executive director**

The *Twin Cities Pioneer Press* reported that Mr. Flaherty — who had strenuously opposed allowing medical marijuana — did not oppose adding intractable pain to the program. Flaherty “said police are unaware of any problems with the current cannabis program and do not expect any now that pain will be included.”

(“Minnesota OKs medical marijuana use for pain,” *Pioneer Press*, December 1, 2015)

### **Col. James Baker, then-Director of Vermont State Police**

“At this point, four years into this, we're comfortable with what's happening and we believe that the people who are getting it are getting it under the true color of what the law is.” (*WCAX-TV*, October 18, 2007)

Sheri Englert of the Vermont Marijuana Registry told the same station, “I haven't seen what I believe to be any abuses thus far. The conditions, the treatments of the conditions, the diseases that the patients have are, it's heart wrenching. It really is.”

### **Mike Schirling, Burlington, Vermont Police Chief**

Burlington Police Chief Mike Schirling, who had been worried about having a dispensary in the city, told a reporter, “I'm not aware of any issues,” after it opened. (“With few complaints, state seeks fourth marijuana dispensary,” *Burlington Free Press*, August 26, 2013)

### **James Kruger Jr., first vice president of the Illinois Chiefs of Police Association**

“Police have not noticed any significant problems with either law [medical marijuana or a civil fine law], according to Oak Brook Police Chief James Kruger Jr., who is first vice president of the Illinois Chiefs of Police Association. ...” The association had strongly opposed allowing medical marijuana. (“Illinois lawmakers propose legalizing recreational marijuana,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 2017; “Illinois Senate approves medical marijuana bill,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 2013)

### **Mike Jones, New Mexico, retired Deputy Chief of Police**

“As a retired law enforcement officer living in the state of New Mexico, which passed a medical marijuana law in 2007, I can attest to the fact that no societal harm or significant problems for law enforcement resulted from the passage of this law.

“Some people, in and out of law enforcement, fear that passage of a medical marijuana law would increase youth access to marijuana or result in substantial diversion of marijuana into the criminal market. Based on my observations of New Mexico's medical marijuana law and activities after its effective date I can affirm that this is unlikely to be the case.

“As a former member of law enforcement, I can understand the reasoning behind those concerns — indeed, colleagues prior to the passage of our state's medical marijuana law held many of them. However, these concerns have simply not been borne out. Overall compliance with the law has been

outstanding.

“In short, these are good laws that protect a limited number of people. In my observation, they do not increase the availability of marijuana to youth or in the criminal market generally, they do not result in additional cost to the state in terms of law enforcement resources, and they do not compromise our efforts to combat illicit marijuana use. I would encourage the Legislature to pass the medical marijuana bill and the governor to sign it. I would also discourage my counterparts in law enforcement from spending an inordinate amount of their time opposing this legislation. In time, they will find, as I did, that their concerns are largely unfounded.”

**Ray White, former Deputy Superintendent/Lieutenant Colonel for the Rhode Island State Police**

“Rhode Island exempted the terribly ill and their caregivers from criminal penalties for marijuana use, possession, and limited cultivation in 2006. In 2009, we created a regulated system to distribute marijuana to the patients in a safe and comfortable environment. We have seen no significant increase in teen use and the compassion centers have been model businesses having no negative effect on their neighborhoods to speak of. Medical marijuana has been a positive for Rhode Island.” (April 30, 2014)

**Eric Nason, Hallowell, Maine Chief of Police**

In Maine, where medical marijuana was approved in 1999, Hallowell Police Chief Eric Nason said his department sees burglaries related to prescription opiates and other drugs, but not marijuana. His department treats a dispensary in town like any other business. (“Vt., Maine offer marijuana lessons,” *Associated Press*, July 18, 2013)

**Richard Mello, Lebanon, New Hampshire Chief of Police**

“We have [a dispensary] in Lebanon, and I can testify that it is very much under the radar. We don’t have any issues... so that seems to be working very well.” (November 6, 2017)

**John Encarnacao, New Hampshire State Police Captain**

“From our standpoint, the program should continue. We don’t have any problem with it... I haven’t heard anything negative about the program.” (October 27, 2017)

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[1] Kepple, Nancy and Freisthler, Bridget, “Exploring the Ecological Association Between Crime and Medical Marijuana Dispensaries,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73(4), 523-530 (2012).

[2] <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/03/140326182049.htm>

[3] Chu, Yu-Wei Luke and Townsend, Wilbur, Joint Culpability: The Effects of Medical Marijuana Laws on Crime (February 12, 2017). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2915909> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2915909>