

Belvidere Man Says Marijuana Saved His Eyesight

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Advocates for legalizing medical marijuana use score a victory at the Illinois State Capitol.

The Senate's Public Health Committee heard from doctors and patients talk about the issue, then passed a medical marijuana bill 6 to 4. Last year was the first time a similar bill made it through a Senate committee, but it stalled once it got to the floor.

State Senator Dave Syverson thinks that'll probably happen again. The bill heads to the full Senate within a month.

One Belvidere man says he's keeping his fingers crossed. Jim Bingenheimer says he's tired of breaking the law. "I'm 54 yrs old. It's time to speak up."

Jim was diagnosed with glaucoma back in 1980. He's been on different meds and had laser surgery but he says the one thing that's helped is lighting up. "I have no doubt from this experience marijuana saved my eyesight."

And medical marijuana supporters say it can do more, such as reduce spasms in people with multiple sclerosis and relieve nausea in cancer patients. But critics say there's no real proof and some point out there already is legal medical marijuana. It's a pill called Marinol, made of synthetic THC. Pharmacist Pat Donohoo says, "They have an oral tablet now that you can dispense. Some people think there's actually more stuff in the actual leaf part of it so some of the studies are showing smoking it has more benefit than taking it as the pill form but we can get the pill form in so if a doctor writes for. We have seen it for nausea in cancer patients. We can get the drug in from the wholesaler."

For Jim, marijuana's been the answer since 1986. He says he's not a druggie and only smokes 3 or 4 times a day, taking several hits. But the police don't see it that way. Jim's best arrested twice for his marijuana use. He's spent two weeks in jail, but says it was worth it. "I know I'd be blind."

Eleven states already have legalized marijuana for medical use.