



Back Home

Share: E-mail Print Digg del.icio.us

## Senate panel approves bill to legalize medical marijuana

By **Andrea Zimmermann**

**RRSTAR.COM**

Posted Mar 05, 2008 @ 10:30 PM

SPRINGFIELD — James Dingenheimer of Belvidere has been waiting for years to smoke marijuana legally.

It gives him some relief from his glaucoma, he says — his ophthalmologist has even given him a prescription for it.

And although a dozen other states, including California, Vermont and Montana, have legalized the use of marijuana for medical purposes, the practice is still illegal in Illinois.

But legislation allowing it moved a step forward Wednesday, when, for the second year in a row, a Senate committee approved it.

The bill, which would legalize marijuana use for people with certain chronic diseases, now moves to the full Senate, where it failed last year with a vote of 22-29.

Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago and the bill's sponsor, said people with cancer, glaucoma, AIDS and other painful illnesses should be allowed to use it.

The legislation allows patients to have no more than two half-ounce doses at one time, and state ID cards would identify those allowed to purchase, possess and use the drug, according to the bill.

The legislation would eliminate state criminal penalties for those who use medicinal marijuana. And although the drug is still illegal at the federal level, states are not required to enforce federal laws, according to the bill.

Law enforcement agencies oppose the legislation because of the host of problems it would present for officers, said Laimutis Nargelenas of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police.

Drivers carrying the ID cards who have "insufficient concentrations" of marijuana in their systems could not be arrested, even though they might be considered driving under the influence, he said.

And even if the Legislature removes the state-level penalties, many local police work for federal drug groups and would be forced to uphold federal law.

"I think we would be giving these individuals a false sense of security," Nargelenas said.

Staff writer *Andrea Zimmermann* may be reached at 217-753-3882 or [azimmermann@rrstar.com](mailto:azimmermann@rrstar.com).

Copyright © 2008 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.