



## State bill legalizing medical marijuana sent to Senate

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SPRINGFIELD — The hazy path to legalizing medical marijuana in Illinois cleared a little Wednesday when a committee on public health sent the legislation to the Senate floor on a 6-4 vote.

The measure, sponsored by state Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago, would allow marijuana card holders to receive prescriptions for medical marijuana and the plant it grows on, thus avoiding any illegal means of obtaining the drug.

“Our first obligation should be ensuring that our laws don’t prevent suffering patients from obtaining needed medicine — or make them criminals if they do,” Cullerton said. “This is about the patients, it’s not about somebody abusing this law to illegally obtain marijuana.”

To make his case, Cullerton presented the committee with two women fighting diseases and disabilities with marijuana to relieve their pain and depression.

“I took and tried every pharmaceutical drug my doctors prescribed to me to help with the symptoms of multiple sclerosis,” said Julie Falco, also a member of the Illinois Drug Education and Legislative Reform board. “Every time I used them, I felt worse. It left me flattened, hopeless, very depressed ... and contemplating suicide.”

Although she drew sympathy from some, Limey Nargelenas, director of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, says there are better ways to go about legalizing the drug than “hiding behind sick people.”

“I think it’s a shame what they’re doing here,” Nargelenas said. “They’re using sick people here to try to legalize marijuana. I think if the Legislature wants to legalize marijuana, let’s talk about it, debate it and see if that’s what the people want.”

Falco said her condition has improved thanks to her marijuana-laced brownies. However, some lawmakers fear that opening the door for even a small portion of the population to use marijuana will lead to further drug abuse.

“This is just a bad idea,” said state Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon.

This latest version of the proposal is the third in as many legislative sessions and the second to make it out of committee. However, these editions are hardly the first attempts at allowing Illinois residents to use the plant legally.

In 1976, the Legislature legalized marijuana for medicinal purposes, so current statute allows the Illinois Department of Public Health to regulate the release of medicinal marijuana to the

public. However, the legislation also requires the governor and law enforcement authorities to sign off on such regulation, something none of the four governors since 1976 have done.

“There’s a law on the books right now, so let’s take advantage of this,” Nargelenas said. “The opportunity is there.”

The bill is Senate Bill 2865.

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