



## The Star-Ledger

### Legalize medicinal pot

Saturday, June 17, 2006

Legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes for seriously ill patients is humane, reasonable and would signal that New Jersey lawmakers have the ability to make the admittedly fine distinction between helping the sick and dying and controlling illegal drug use.

The Legislature ought to adopt bills pending in the Assembly and Senate that would prevent law enforcement from prosecuting patients in possession of marijuana if they are card-carrying medically approved users. To qualify for such status, a person would need a prescription from a physician, verifying that he suffers from cancer, HIV-AIDS, glaucoma, multiple sclerosis or other specifically enumerated medical conditions.

Wisely, the bill says neither the government nor health insurance companies would be responsible for paying the cost of medicinal marijuana.

Yes, federal law bans medical marijuana practices. But 11 states have enacted legislation allowing it, betting that the federal Drug Enforcement Administration has better targets than cancer patients trying to alleviate their pain.

Opponents of the measure argue that the therapeutic efficacy of marijuana is unproved and that conventional drugs, approved by the Food and Drug Administration, are available for pain and spasms. And they worry that marijuana will get into the hands of recreational users.

Those are valid but not sufficient concerns. Like chicken soup, prayer and vitamins, the benefits may not be scientifically conclusive. Yet, if people believe marijuana makes them feel better, improves their appetite, stops vomiting or enables them to get the strength to go to work, should they be denied help?

Assemblymen Reed Gusciora (D-Mercer) and Michael Patrick Carroll (R-Morris), arguably the most liberal and most conservative members of the Legislature, respectively, have joined forces to support medical marijuana. Their bill is identical to the Senate version introduced by Sen. Nicholas Scutari, a Union County Democrat.

There are no plans to vote on the bill anytime soon, and that's a mistake.

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