

# Feds Can No Longer Raid State Medical Marijuana Dispensaries

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Federal agents will no longer be able to raid medical marijuana dispensaries in states where medical marijuana is legal under a provision included in the \$1.1 trillion spending law President Obama signed December 16.

Enactment of the law changes a two-decade-long battle between the states and the federal government. Although 32 states and the District of Columbia [have legalized](#) medical marijuana, the Drug Enforcement Administration still classifies it as a Schedule I drug, the same class as heroin, LSD, and ecstasy, which signifies it has no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Before this law, the Justice Department could shut down dispensaries that states legally opened, although under the Obama Administration the department had kept its distance. Under the [measure](#), included in the 1603-page law, federal agents would be prohibited from such raids. The government also cannot interfere in implementation of states' medical marijuana laws, under the [amendment](#) cosponsored by Republican Rep. Dana Rohrabacher and Democrat Rep. Sam Farr, both of California.

"This is a victory for so many," Rohrabacher said in a [statement](#), "including scores of our wounded veterans, who have found marijuana to be an important medicine for some of the ailments they suffer, such as PTSD, epilepsy, and [multiple sclerosis]."

The move is also a victory for medical marijuana advocates and dispensary owners and operators.

Pharmacist Joseph Friedman, RPh, in Lincolnshire, Illinois, has applied to open three dispensaries in Illinois. He told *Medscape Medical News* the move brings "a sigh of relief" and adds a layer of protection for owners and operators of dispensaries.

"Every day these dispensary owners open their doors, they had in the shadow the risk of the feds coming in and shutting them down for any number of reasons," he said. "That's not to say that the ones selling to children or that are close to schools or doing anything under the table don't deserve to get shut down."

"We had only heard up until this point that the federal government wouldn't fund any more raids on dispensaries, so this just makes it official," he said.

Mason Tvert, spokesman for the Marijuana Policy Project, a national group dedicated to changing state laws to reduce or eliminate penalties for the medical and non-medical use of marijuana, told *Medscape Medical News* this law marks "the first time in history that Congress has approved a measure intended to draw down the federal government's war on marijuana."

But he said there is always the possibility that the law, which proponents had tried to pass six times before, could be interpreted in different ways and said he is skeptical the threat of intervention is completely nullified.

The law also covers spending only for fiscal year 2015.

## **Some Not Convinced of Medical Benefits**

Still, some medical organizations, including the American Medical Association and the American Cancer Society, are not ready to endorse the medical benefits of marijuana without further research.

The American Cancer Society declined to comment on this week's legislation, but a spokeswoman said the society "opposes the smoking or vaping of marijuana and other cannabinoids in public places, because the carcinogens in marijuana smoke pose numerous health hazards to the patient and others in the patient's presence."

Timothy Coetzee, PhD, chief advocacy, services and research officer at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, told *Medscape Medical News* that the society supports the rights of people with multiple sclerosis to work with their providers to access marijuana for medical purposes in states where it is legal and supports further research to better understand the benefits and risks as a treatment for the disease.

"We believe that the federal government's decision to end their prohibition on the use of marijuana for medical purposes in fiscal year 2015 will ease the existing legal confusion in those states listed in the legislation," he said.

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