

Landmark medical marijuana bill introduced in US Congress

March 10 2015

US senators on Tuesday introduced the most comprehensive legislation on medical marijuana ever brought before Congress, a bipartisan effort aimed at ending federal restrictions on the increasingly accepted treatment.

Twenty-three states already allow the use of cannabis to treat [medical conditions](#) like multiple sclerosis (MS) and epilepsy, but federal law still exposes users of the drug to potential investigation and arrest.

"Highly-trained officials in our country—doctors and scientists, medical personnel—are unable to prescribe and recommend drugs that could alleviate the pain and suffering of their patients," Senate Democrat Cory Booker told reporters.

"Today we join together to say enough is enough," he added. "Our federal government has long overstepped the boundaries of common sense, fiscal prudence and compassion with its [marijuana laws](#)."

The Compassionate Access, Research Expansion and Respect States (CARERS) Act would remove federal penalties and restrictions for producing, distributing and possessing marijuana for medical purposes, provided there is compliance with state law.

It would give military veterans access to [medical marijuana](#) in states where it is legal, and it would crucially allow financial institutions to provide banking services to marijuana businesses.

It would also reclassify marijuana from "Schedule I" to "Schedule II," eliminating current barriers to research and recognizing the acceptable medical use of the drug.

Senator Rand Paul, a likely 2016 Republican presidential candidate, pointed to the "tens of thousands of people in our country who have diseases that are incurable and that would like to seek palliative treatment."

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said current law was "clearly a case of ideology getting in the way of scientific progress."

The New York Democrat highlighted the case of constituents whose sick children were in desperate need of treatment unavailable through traditional medications.

Under current law, people who travel to states where medical marijuana is legal would be subject to arrest for crossing state borders and returning home with the drug.

"When a child doesn't have 100 seizures a day, their brain can actually develop, and they can grow, they can have more moments with their families, with their friends. They can develop emotionally," Gillibrand said.

Advocacy group Americans for Safe Access called the legislation "groundbreaking."

Congress last year passed a one-year funding measure including a section that prohibited the Justice Department from using funds to interfere in states' implementation of their medical marijuana laws.

ASA says Tuesday's bill goes further by codifying the change, and

expanding restrictions on interference with state medical marijuana laws to all federal agencies.

Sandy Fiola, who was diagnosed with MS in 1988, described medical marijuana as an answer to her prayers, after exhausting traditional medicine options.

"In the early stages of my illness, I did not sleep for about four years," she said, with Booker at her side.

"I obtained some (marijuana) and I tried it. The next thing I knew it was morning, and I cried when I woke up," she said.

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