

Stop the Attack - California

ASA's Plan to Stop the Federal Pressure on Medical Cannabis and Take Back the Momentum

On October 7, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) announced a crackdown on medical cannabis patients' cooperatives, collectives, gardens, and others. The scope of the crackdown is shocking. Federal officials and agencies are threatening providers, growers, and property owners. They are seeking to intimidate elected officials, financial service providers, legal gun owners, and media outlets. This may be the broadest and most serious threat to medical cannabis yet.

Americans for safe Access (ASA), the nation's leading medical cannabis patient advocacy organization, has a plan to stop the federal interference and intimidation and take back the momentum for patients. The four components that comprise this plan are: (1) putting direct political pressure on lawmakers to oppose the DOJ's tactics; (2) reframing the national conversation about medical cannabis; (3) using new legal initiatives to stall or stop federal pressure; (4) supporting local advocates who are coping with the fallout of federal pressure in cities and counties statewide. To accomplish all of this, ASA must expand its staff, operational, and grassroots capacity. We need timely support from our constituents to rise to the occasion and stop the federal attack.

"Stop the Attack" involves recruiting state and federal lawmakers to put direct political pressure on the DOJ; and mobilizing a well-trained and strategic grassroots base to visit every district office in the state to clearly demonstrate support for standing up to federal interference and intimidation. This political push will not just focus on stopping the activity we do not want. ASA staff and members will be advocating for state and federal legislation that will help stop the federal pressure.

State and federal lawmakers are already responding to this effort. State Senators Mark Leno (D-SF) and Leland Yee (D-SF), Assembly Member Tom Ammiano (D-SF), California Attorney General Kamala Harris, and several local elected officials have already spoken publicly in opposition to the crackdown. US Congressmen Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and Sam Farr (D-CA) spoke up early in the crackdown, and more recently, seven other Members of Congress joined them in signing a letter to President Obama calling for rescheduling.

In addition to political solution, ASA will also be launching a proactive media campaign designed to reframe the national conversation about medical cannabis, by bringing the patients' needs back to the forefront. This plan involves indentifying new opinion leaders to speak out about the federal crackdown and need for federal reform; and includes innovative new strategies to get patients' faces back in front of policy makers, media, and voters.

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ASA has already filed a groundbreaking Tenth Amendment lawsuit to fight back against federal threats against stakeholders, including cultivators, providers, and property owners. We are also expediting work on important state litigation that will help establish the right of patients to acquire medicine inside a cooperative or collective and federal litigation to force a change in the classification of medical cannabis under federal law.

ASA must also help support local advocates coping with the fallout from the federal interference and intimidation in cities and counties. Some local officials have stalled efforts to implement medical cannabis programs, leaving patients and providers alike in limbo. ASA has already dramatically expanded our capacity to support local advocates by providing a free online Advocates Training Center, which uses videos and digital workbooks teach grassroots organizers basic, intermediate, and even advanced organizing skills. The program is also available in an inexpensive paper workbook format. Visit <http://www.AmericansForSafeAccess.org/TrainingCenter> to learn more.

ASA realizes that our grassroots base will need more than just training to be effective. That is why we have organized our innovative Medical Cannabis Policy Think Tank and Policy Shop to help support local efforts to implement medical cannabis laws, stop bans, and when necessary adopt voter initiatives and referendums. The Think Tank and Policy Shop gives local activists a vehicle through which to use our expertise and experience, while acting as effective local leaders in cities and counties statewide. Visit <http://www.AmericansForSafeAccess.org/PolicyShop> to learn more.

Using political, media, and legal strategies, ASA can stop the federal attack on medical cannabis in California and support local advocates fighting back in their communities. We have done it before. ASA was instrumental in stopping a similar attack by the Bush Administration in 2007 and 2008. But to be effective we need the participation and financial support of our constituents.

Contact ASA California Director Don Duncan at don@safeaccessnow.org or (323) 326-6347 for more information or to discuss how you can help.

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With the support of our grassroots base, ASA can:

1. **Recruit state and elected officials to pressure the DOJ for change.** Our state and federal representatives can apply direct political pressure to the Obama Administration, including the DOJ, to abandon tactics designed to disrupt community-based access to medical cannabis. ASA has already secured the support of state and federal champions, and we are prepared to expand this effort to more effectively demonstrate the breadth of support for medical cannabis among our elected representatives.
 - Work with champions and allies in elected office to build public opposition to the crackdown.
 - Meet with state and federal lawmakers to address their concerns about medical cannabis.
 - Work behind the scenes to arrange, support, and/or participate in meetings with lawmakers and Administration officials.
 - Coordinate strategic grassroots pressure to turn ambivalent lawmakers into allies or champions.

2. **Train and mobilize the grassroots base to visit every state and federal district office in the state.** Our elected officials rarely hear from constituents about medical cannabis, so they do not know there is a safe political space to stand up against federal attacks on medical cannabis patients' access. ASA is committed to training and mobilizing patients, providers, and citizen advocates to visit every state and federal district office in California to urge opposition to the federal attack on medical cannabis.
 - Promote the use of our Online Advocates Training Center through our chapters, affiliates, mailing lists, social media, etc.
 - Launch a statewide campaign to get medical cannabis advocates into every district office in the state.
 - Tour the state of California to conduct trainings and encourage local participation.
 - Devote ASA staff time to strategically-significant state and federal districts.

3. **Directly advocate with state and federal representatives to stop change laws.** ASA staff will be talking with state and federal officials about the need to stop the federal pressure on safe access and adopt legislation to implement state law. Supported by a robust, well trained, and strategic grassroots base; ASA staff will advocate for federal legislation like US Representative Barney Frank's (D-MA) HR 1983 and ASA draft state legislation. That legislation will establish the civil rights of patients, recognize patients' cooperatives and collectives, and finally protect medical cannabis cultivators.
 - Meet directly with state lawmakers to support legislation that will protect patients' civil rights, authorize dispensing cooperatives and collectives, and protect cultivators.
 - Support voter initiatives that will protect patients' civil rights, authorize dispensing cooperatives and collectives, and protect cultivators.
 - Meet directly with federal lawmakers to support HR 1983.
 - Meet directly with other state and federal public officials, including the California Attorney General, Governor, officials in federal administrative agencies, etc.

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4. **Motivate opinion leaders to speak out about federal interference and intimidation.** Celebrities, influential media, clergy, and other opinion leaders can help frame public debate and sway popular opinion. ASA has the connections, expertise, and clear message to motivate opinion leaders to speak out about medical cannabis.
 - Recruit celebrities, media personalities, and other opinion leaders to speak out in defense of patients' access.
 - Prepare talking points and other support material for spokespeople.
 - Assist in creating opportunities for opinion leaders to speak up in prestigious national media outlets and in viral media campaigns.

5. **Reframe the national media dialogue by putting patients' faces and stories back at the forefront of the conversation about medical cannabis.** ASA's will update its powerful "Patients in the Crossfire" campaign to move the public debate about medical cannabis back where it belongs: safe access for patients with serious medical conditions. This is the message that persuaded voters and lawmakers in California and fifteen other states to legalize medical cannabis. ASA's new video-based format will bring "Patients in the Crossfire" to voters and elected officials in a timely and impactful manner.
 - Prepare talking points and other support material for grassroots and "grasstops" advocates properly framing the issue of medical cannabis.
 - Create and publish new "Patients in the Crossfire" video segments to be released individually and as a professionally-edited short film.
 - Promote the new videos using a viral media strategy, with a special focus on cutting-edge online and social media strategies.
 - Continue to use traditional media work to keep the patients' voice at the front of the national debate about medical cannabis. This includes press releases, op-ed's, articles, broadcast media, etc.

6. **Explore and initiate legal challenges to federal threats to patients' access and industries that support medical cannabis patients, providers, and cultivators.** On October 27, 2011, ASA filed a groundbreaking lawsuit to stop the recent escalation in federal pressure against medical cannabis cultivators, providers, and others. *Americans for Safe Access v. Holder* challenges the Obama Administration's attempt to subvert local and state medical cannabis laws. We argue that the Tenth Amendment forbids the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other federal agencies from using coercive tactics to commandeer the law-making functions of state and local governments.
 - Recruit new plaintiffs for *ASA v. Holder*, including patients, providers, property owners, elected officials, and other victims of the federal escalation.
 - Mount a media campaign to raise awareness about the lawsuit and its goals.
 - Continue to explore new legal strategies to stall or stop federal pressure.

7. **Support local efforts to stop bans and onerous restrictions on safe access, using ASA's new Online Training Center, innovative Think Tank and Policy Shop, and voter referendum campaigns.** ASA recognizes the need to train and mobilize local activists in cities and counties statewide, so that patients'

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voices are heard in every community. Our new training and support programs put ASA's resources to work in local communities, where federal threats are already impacting policies. Voter referendums and initiatives will be a key component in ASA's efforts to stop bans and unreasonable restrictions on providers and cultivators.

- Continue to develop and promote our innovation Medical Cannabis Think tank and Policy Shop to support local efforts at implementation, referendums, and voter initiatives.
- Expand staff resources to accommodate more projects.
- Promote this support vehicle to our grassroots base.
- Build a brand identity for the Medical Cannabis Think tank and Policy Shop to better empower members and allies using it at the local level.

About Americans for Safe Access (ASA)

ASA is the largest national member-based organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research. ASA works in partnership with state, local and national legislators to overcome barriers and create policies that improve access to cannabis for patients and researchers. We have more than 50,000 members, with chapters and affiliates in all fifty states.

ASA provides legal training for and medical information to patients, attorneys, health and medical professionals and policymakers throughout the United States. We also organize media support for court cases, rapid response to law enforcement raids, and capacity-building for advocates. Our successful lobbying, media and legal campaigns have resulted in important court precedents, new sentencing standards, and more compassionate community guidelines.

Patients and their loved ones established ASA in 2002 for the purpose of building a strong grassroots movement to protect patients and their rights to safe and legal access. In 2002, the national debate centered on preventing and defending people arrested for cannabis use. The debate for and against medical cannabis was centered on whether or not patients should be arrested and prosecuted. By bringing the patient's voice to the table, we have shifted the debate to the real concerns of patients: safe access and patients' civil rights.

At ASA, we have learned that patients are the best suited to advocate for policies that impact their lives. It was the patient led grassroots movement that passed both Proposition 215 and SB 420 in California. That is why ASA makes training and skill building a priority in our work. ASA is clearinghouse for legislative proposals and educational information, and works to empower a vibrant and active field. Our new Online Training Center, Think Tank and Policy Shop, and comprehensive training materials and programs are key components of our program.

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