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# Lawmaker works to ban drug

**SALEM (AP)** — Back in 1973, when the counterculture was still in full bloom, Oregon became the first state in the nation to decriminalize the possession of marijuana.

Now, with a more conservative Legislature and increasing awareness about problems associated with drug abuse, a state lawmaker is working to reverse that law and make it a crime again to possess marijuana.

"As the parent of a 10-year-old, I believe it's time to issue a call for zero tolerance," said Rep. Jerry Grisham, R-Beavercreek, on Monday. "This is a good place to start in turning away from the drug culture."

Under a bill sponsored by Grisham, people convicted of possessing less than an ounce of marijuana could face up to six months in jail. Under current law, the penalty is a maximum \$1,000 fine with no jail term.

Grisham's bill will receive its first public airing Tuesday in the

House Judiciary Committee. Opponents of HB3251 said putting pot smokers in jail would have little deterrent value and cost a lot of money at a time when the state is trying to figure out how to pay for putting more violent offenders behind bars.

"We don't need to put people in jail for possessing a plant that's never killed anyone," said Chris Iverson of Portland.

Iverson and others have filed papers with the state for a 1996 ballot measure that would do the opposite: legalize marijuana use for adults and allow them to purchase it in liquor stores.

Grisham and other backers of HB3251 say that's not the direction the state is headed. Tougher penalties for marijuana possession are needed, they say, to fix a lenient law that was enacted when the potency of marijuana was much lower than it is today.

While not formally endorsing the bill, Jeff Kushner of the Oregon Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs said there is little doubt marijuana is an addic-

tive substance that causes problems for its users.

"A lot of people think of marijuana as a very soft, recreational drug," Kushner said. "But many people who use it simply can't stop. It's addictive from the standpoint that there are physical withdrawal symptoms as well as psychological problems."

Kushner also said, however, he has doubts about whether the Legislature is prepared to pay the costs of criminal possession of marijuana. Those costs would include not only the expense of jailing marijuana smokers but also providing lawyers to those who can't afford one, Kushner noted.

But Grisham said he thinks the Legislature needs to send a message — especially to children — Oregon won't tolerate illegal drug use.

"I believe the current makeup of the Legislature and the current attitude of the citizens is that they are ready for zero tolerance in drug abuse," he said.

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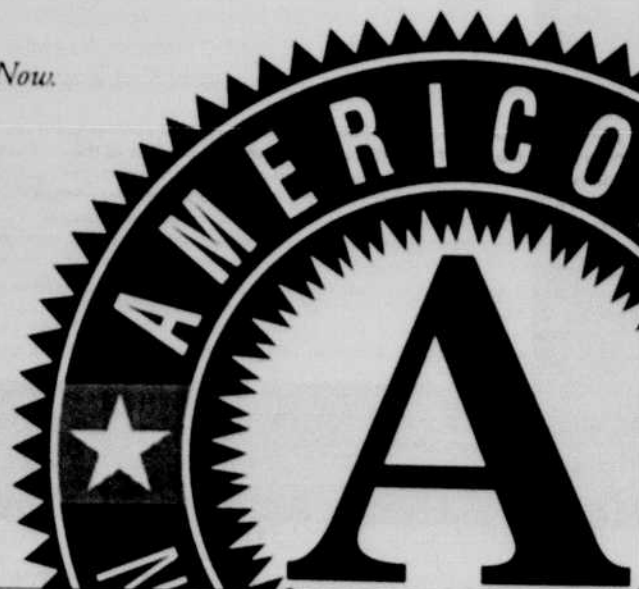
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