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LOCAL NEWS



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Madeline Martinez, founder of Portland's Cannabis Café, joins supporters Anna Diaz and lawyer Paul Loney at a rally on Friday outside City Hall to counter an effort by Oregon's federal prosecutor to crackdown on medical marijuana dispensaries.

Medical Marijuana Supporters Rally Counter threat of crackdowns on dispensaries

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Medical marijuana supporters rallied outside City Hall on Friday to protest a recent letter from Oregon's federal prosecutor threatening a crackdown on marijuana dispensaries.

"I think this is a civil rights issue," said Madeline Martinez, the founder of Portland's Cannabis Café. "This is discrimination on a certain group of people who are all following state laws."

The June 3 letter from U. S. Attorney Dwight C. Holton, and district attorneys, sheriffs and police chiefs from across Oregon, but not including Multnomah County, served notice on Oregon businesses selling marijuana that the sale of the drug for any purpose, including for medical purposes, violates both federal and Oregon law.

"Drug traffickers are hiding behind the medical marijuana law to protect their sham operations," said Marion County District Attorney Walt Beglau. "We have to rein in this outlaw atmosphere before any kid can walk into a storefront on Main Street in any town in Oregon and buy marijuana illegally."

But those within the medical marijuana activist community disagree, and said they are not breaking any Oregon laws.

"Judges decide the law in this country, not sheriffs, not district attorneys," Oregon NORML Legal Counsel Paul Loney told the crowd.

Anna Diaz, a board member of Oregon NORML, also spoke at the protest. She said Oregon doesn't have medical marijuana dispensaries written into the law, which makes it difficult for patients to have access to medicine.

But According to the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, the 1998 Oregon Medical Marijuana Act protects medical marijuana users who comply with its requirements from state criminal prosecution for production, possession or delivery of a controlled substance.

"You have to either grow your own or designate people to grow it for you," said Diaz. "But a lot can go wrong."

To fill this gap, she said medical marijuana places are popping up all over the state, and they are doing their best for patients to have a safe place to medicate, like Martinez's Cannabis Café where no medical marijuana is sold, but is given away to medical marijuana holders who pay membership fees.

"To get this letter from the Department of Justice, saying they are going to shut us down for being an illegal dispensary is ridiculous," Diaz said.

A number of individuals with Cannabis Cards issued to them by the state held signs, which read 'Let's be sensible Oregon' and 'Cannabis Prohibition: Ineffective, Expensive and Harmful.' They said they were rallying because they don't believe they are breaking any laws and doing anything wrong.

Cher Muttall, who has been a card holder for seven years, countered any notion that marijuana dispensaries are bad for youth.

"This is the safest way to keep it out of children's hands. Drug dealers don't ID," she said.

Martinez said if any other program within the state showed the success the medical marijuana program has shown, it would be receiving kudos from the government.

"I am a disabled Oregonian," she explained to rally supporters. "We want to be free of pharmaceutical poison. I will not take vicodin."

Raphael Martinez, Madeline Martinez's son, called medical marijuana card holders' innocent bystanders who "just want to be well."

"To make them go back to the black market and commit crimes—it's really sad," he said.

He explained as Native Americans, he has been taught the concept his whole life that mother earth gives medicine for everyone to use.