

Holy S#*T, There is a Bill! What Now?



Canna-Patient Resource Connection

Tips for Citizen Engagement for Medical Cannabis

How a Bill Becomes Law

***States can vary, so be sure to check the rules for your state.**

Step 1

Bill must be:



- Drafted.
- Sponsored by a Legislator.
- Introduced. (We will pretend our Bill was started in the Senate.)
- After the bill is introduced, it is assigned to a Committee. In this case, it will go to a Senate Committee.

Action needed: Develop relationships with your Legislators.

Step 2



The Senate Committee has a public hearing to determine whether the bill should be heard on the floor. THIS is the time amendments can be introduced. The Committee needs to hear from you **before** the hearing about any amendments. There are generally 2-3 hearings in each committee, so be ready to come back rather quickly.

ACTION: Send emails, make phone calls, do media interviews, host rallies, be prepared to take the day off to testify at the State Capitol for the hearings. Target the specific committee, but copy your area Legislators in on it—both Senate and House.

If the Bill doesn't pass Committee hearings, it dies.

If the Bill passes, it goes to the Floor for debate and vote.

Step 3

Bills that pass out of Committee go to the Senate Floor to be debated. Public comment is generally not allowed in this phase. There could be several floor votes, and it is not advisable to introduce amendments at this time. Wait until it hits the next committee.



ACTION: You need as many constituents calling/emailing their Legislators as possible. Get as much publicity as possible to help pressure legislators.

If the Bill doesn't pass the Floor Vote, it dies.

If the Bill passes, it goes to the next Chamber and repeats the process from step 2.

Step 4

BILL PASSES BOTH LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS

If the Bill passes both Chambers of the Legislature, it heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

Three things can happen:

- The Governor signs the bill into law.
- The Governor vetoes the Bill and it fails.
- If it is within a few days of the end of the legislative season, the Governor doesn't have to sign it but it becomes law anyway.



The Bill becomes law or fails.

Ideas and Tips

State Level Tips:

- Host a Lobby Day where you reserve a room at the Capitol and invite patients to meet legislators. Make sure the Committee members are invited. Teach citizens how to effectively lobby.
- Show people how they can get involved and make it simple. (provide scripts and sample letters but emphasize their personal stories matter. When to send emails, when to call, TV interviews, etc.)
- Connect with entities that will support the amendment requests. The bigger and more organized you appear, the better chance you have of being taken seriously.
- Rally everyone to the hearings for testimony. You need it on public record that issues exist, even if you don't win the changes. Visuals are fabulous (Box of pill bottles you want to replace, etc.)
- Offer to host educational classes for the legislators. They can be done online.
- Develop relationships with your elected officials. Find common ground and stay away from party politics as much as reasonable. You must relate to the legislator before they will trust you. Stick to the issue as much as possible.
- Remember you are campaigning and lobbying. You have to be flexible and be able to respond quickly to legislation changes. Have a plan but make it loose enough it can be modified.
- Don't expect the government to make sense. You will drive yourself mad.
- Yes, everyone wants to end prohibition, but if you focus on anything too "stoner" a medical bill won't pass. Never lose sight of what a medical bill means and how people are dying without access.
- Don't push for changes you know you can't win; else you won't get anything done.
- Understand this is a long-term process. You aren't going to go in and magically get an end to prohibition.
- If the issue is a medical program, so focus on that. If recreational isn't on the docket right now, don't pump recreational. If you can't lobby specifically for the medical, stay out of the way of folks who can. Lives depend on it, and ending prohibition isn't going to happen overnight. Focus.
- Educate your moderators and admins. Create an educated juggernaut.
- Leave the egos at the door. Superstar BS will kill your bill. There is no one single person that will be successful. Lobbying and PR take a dedicated team of people.





Local Level Tips/Ideas:

- Contact condition-based groups and Veteran Organizations to gain support.
- Local advocates can organize publicity events locally. Examples are marching in parades, attending health fairs, rallies.
- Each area should have at least 2 families that will do local TV interviews. The more publicity you get, the more the legislators must listen.
- Do local classes on Beginner Therapeutic and Cannabinoids and Terpenes. The more educated the voter base is, the better. Reserve library rooms, ask churches if you can teach a class there, ask VFWs, American Legions, Lupus Groups, Cancer Groups. Etc.
- Make sure regional advocates get the Action Alerts out to their regions.

Education

- Educate yourself about your/your loved one's condition and how cannabis works with it. Stand on the personal story combined with science to back it up.
- Learn how to read scientific studies. Google Scholar is a powerful tool.
- Don't use blog articles as sources, except if they link to the direct source or study. For example, don't share an article about an autism study unless a link goes directly to the study.
- Don't quote statistics you don't have direct sources for.
- Teach people how to tell their story in 2-3 minutes. They will cut you off.
- Help educate people on how to use their voices. Let them know their calls and emails do matter and encourage them to tell their story.
- Teach everyone about how therapeutic cannabis works. Make sure they understand dosing can be extremely high (cancer patients can take up to 1,000mg THC every day, terminal/hospice patients even more), variety matters (cannabinoids and terpenes), and explain why you are asking for any changes.
- Just as much as emotion and personal stories matter, data does too. Combine data with personal experience, and always have copies of the science you will be citing.

Social Media

- Use memes and info graphics to teach people how to get involved.
- Be sure to post science-based, vetted education. There is a lot of propaganda out there that has been debunked. Don't promote things that cause you to lose credibility like "it's just a plant", "you need cannabis because you have an endocannabinoid system", or "we don't have a Zoloft system". The sooner the voters catch up with the science coming out, the better chance you have to make headway.
- Occasionally share funny memes, however, watch the stoner culture. You need to break the stigma – not promote it. This is 100% strategically necessary to be taken seriously at the legislature. Closet patients don't come out unless they can relate to those who are brave enough to be out.
- Share patient success stories. You need to be able to pull at the general public's heart strings. Without that, there won't be any buy in and there is a greater chance of failure.
- You have to have a PR game. There is a large toolbox of techniques to use, so be sure you use your resources as wisely as possible. The goal is to appear more organized and bigger than what we are.
- Not everyone can do everything, but everyone can do something. Be realistic in the volunteer expectations.
- Take time off and set boundaries. You will be doing this for years to come, so no reason to damage your mental health by absorbing in it. Be sure to take your family time and respect others doing the same.



Ideology

- Break the “stoner” stigma. Show the legislators there are real patients who need access.
- Know your science and keep up with research. The legislators want to know that you completely understand what you are getting into. They want to hear about science advances in your specific condition and why you need this therapeutically. Admit there are drug interactions, cannabis isn’t a cure all, that it isn’t for everyone, and healthy youth shouldn’t be lighting joints on the corner.
- Demonstrate you are sensible and capable of applying cannabis therapeutically. They can’t argue with competency.
- A smart constituency uses data or emotion to promote their issue. A wise constituency uses **both** data and emotion to hammer home the point. Use a solid and comprehensive strategy.
- Don’t promote propaganda or statements that are easily debunked. Cannabis can stand on its own with the data available, so show the solid data. Propaganda like, “all use is medical” will not win votes.

FIND YOUR VOICE

- ◆ Usually timed.
- ◆ Be precise. What do you support? What are you against?
- ◆ Have notes. It is okay to read your testimony.
- ◆ Respect the time limits.
- ◆ Use respectful language.

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It is important to make sure testimony is in public record. As cannabis legalization moves forward, you have public testimony as a basis for further access expansion.

#lifenugets

