

Six men plead not guilty after marijuana dispensary sweep

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Six men accused of selling marijuana at illegal dispensaries throughout the county pleaded not guilty yesterday to felony charges.

The men were arrested last week during a multi-agency sweep aimed at catching offenders prosecutors said were abusing Proposition 215, California's 1996 medical marijuana law.

Prosecutor Dana Greisen told a San Diego Superior Court judge yesterday the defendants were owners, operators and/or customers of the dispensaries, which provided marijuana to anyone with a recommendation signed by a doctor or caregiver.

However, an investigation revealed the dispensary operators made thousands of dollars a day, often selling to people with no apparent medical conditions, the prosecutor said.

Among those arraigned was John Thomas Sullivan, 38, of San Diego, who faces charges of insurance fraud, receiving stolen property, possession of marijuana for sale and perjury in state court. If convicted, he could be sent to prison for more than six years.

Sullivan also faces federal charges.

The prosecutor described Sullivan in court yesterday as “a longtime con artist,” with a history of prescription fraud. He said Sullivan has previous convictions in various California counties for forgery, grand theft and insurance fraud.

Griesen told the judge that Sullivan – like others arrested in the sweep – was acting as a primary caregiver to his marijuana customers without any qualification to do so. The law defines a primary caregiver as someone who is “consistently responsible for the health, safety or housing of an individual.”

“The only relationship Mr. Sullivan has with these people is the same one a supermarket has with their customers,” the prosecutor said.

Deputy Public Defender Juliana Humphrey – who represented several of the defendants yesterday, but not Sullivan – noted in court that the state's medical marijuana law allows patients to use pot, but there's no place to get it.

She said the men she represented yesterday were “seeking to provide medicine in a safe environment and make real the promise of a law that was enacted 10 years ago.”

The others arraigned yesterday were: Anthony Amrine, 33; Ahmad Abdul-Jalil, 21; Amaro Jesus, 34, Riley Hoskins-Butts, 26; and Michael Julian Crane, 42. All were being held in county jail.


They face charges including possession of marijuana for sale and sale of marijuana. They could be sent to prison for up to six years if convicted, the prosecutor said.



SCOTT LINNETT / Union-Tribune
Anthony Amrine, Riley Hoskins-Butts and Amaro Jesus (from left) are three of the six men who appeared in court on Monday.

Others arrested in the sweep are expected to be arraigned in the coming weeks.

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