

**Statement of Dr. Nicholas A. Pace  
In Opposition to Assembly Bill - 804 and Senate Bill - 119  
The “Medical” Marijuana Bill**

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*President Obama should be commended for signing tobacco legislation aimed at keeping children from smoking and giving the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate the Tobacco Industry. Ironically, despite this excellent regulatory tobacco bill, many of our State Legislators are quietly preparing to pass laws promoting smoking “medical” marijuana. This despite the numerous medical organizations\* who support the FDA’s position that there are no sound scientific studies supporting the medical use of marijuana. The FDA position is attached.*

*Marijuana smoke is more toxic to the lungs than tobacco smoke. Marijuana smoke contains 421 different toxic chemicals, twice the number of carcinogens, and can be contaminated with bacteria and fungus. A recent study showed that a single marijuana joint is as damaging as five tobacco cigarettes. This is the result of marijuana smoke having a higher burn temperature than tobacco and that marijuana smoke is inhaled more deeply and held in the lungs longer than cigarette smoke causing a greater carcinogenic effect.*

*The potential medical use of marijuana is very limited due to its severe variability of action and many undesirable neurological, psychiatric, and cardiopulmonary side effects. With protracted use, marijuana’s prolonged half life accumulates in the fatty tissues leading to the development of increased tolerance and physiological addiction. These reasons preclude its general medical use*

*Marijuana’s limited medical use was narrowed to: as an appetite stimulant for AIDS patients, mild pain control, and the control of nausea in chemotherapy. Its use as an appetite stimulant for AIDS patients does not cause weight gain since these patients have an infection causing an undesired breakdown of protein inhibiting weight gain. The effectiveness of marijuana for pain relief is mild, less than that of two tablespoons of codeine cough medication and is associated with psychoactive and other undesirable side effects. For the nausea of chemotherapy, a synthetic oral form of marijuana (Marinol) is available via prescription. Most oncologists rarely use Marinol since there are now much more effective medications available for nausea that do not suppress the immune system.*

*Those legislators who believe that there is a compassionate need for medical marijuana should be informed that a new medical marijuana law is not necessary since the oral form (Marinol ) with its four hour plasma tissue concentration is*

*legally available. The use of the oral drug avoids the toxic effects of smoking marijuana which has a rapid short 1 hour plasma tissue concentration.*

*The academic medical community does not support the wealthy well organized non-medical lobbying groups that are systematically going from state to state promoting a "compassionate" need for a smoking medical marijuana law.*

*Marijuana smoking has become a serious medical and social problem. The strength of the drug has increased in potency in the last 8 years going from 3.2% to 8.8%. There has been 175% increase of teens with marijuana-related problems crowding emergency rooms. Over the last 15 years there has been a 188% increase in the proportion of teen treatment admissions with a medical diagnosis of marijuana dependence, compared with a 54% decline for all other substances of abuse. (Report by National Center on Addiction & Substance Abuse (CASA), June 2008).*

*The increased potency and availability of marijuana parallels the increase in the use of medical marijuana. Meanwhile recent scientific studies of individuals smoking marijuana in a prolonged heavy manner, in addition to cognitive impairment have shown;*

- Pulmonary impairment of large airway function with obstruction Aldington S, et al Thorax. 2007 Dec; 62(12):1058-63*
- Regional brain damage in both the hippocampus (mediating memory and emotion) amygdala (mediating fear and aggression) Lubman D, Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2008 Jun; 65(6):694-701.*
- Neuro-psychiatric disorders with either transient signs of psychotic disorders with hallucinations and paranoid delusions or more sustained psychotic symptoms McGuire P, Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2009 Apr; 442-51.*
- High incidence of an aggressive fast-growing testicular cancer in young men who as adolescents began using at least once a week. ((2/9/09 Journal "Cancer" Hutchinson Cancer Research center Seattle WA)*
- Multiple Sclerosis patients had worsening of their MS symptoms with increased cognitive defects and mood disorders. (Ghaffar & Feinstein, Neurology.2008Jul.15:164-9.*

*Legitimizing smoking marijuana as a compassionate medical necessity leaves young people with the false impression that marijuana is a harmless drug that can be safely used casually for recreation. Physicians are taught to believe in the scientific method which places critical analysis of scientifically researched evidence above ideology, opinion, or reliance on accounts which are merely anecdotal and above all to do no harm. In this spirit we should support President Obama's Tobacco initiative but not support legislation that allows the toxic use of smoking medical marijuana.*

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*\*A partial list of national medical organizations opposed to medical marijuana, include: the American Medical Association, the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Glaucoma Society, and the National Eye Institute.*