Capitol Update: Marijuana Legalization Talks Fill Capitol

While talks of marijuana legalization efforts permeate the Cal Chiefs’ office daily, there is only one opportunity to raise objections to the initiative in front of the entire Legislature. After an initiative qualifies for the ballot, the Legislature is charged with having a public hearing in order to inform the public about the initiative’s contents. While we aren’t sure how many interested members of the public watch these hearings, they certainly make for a spectacle. On Tuesday, the Assembly Health, Assembly Business and Professions, Assembly Banking and Finance and Senate Business and Professions committees held a joint hearing on the Adult Use of Marijuana Act.

Cal Chiefs, CPOA, Cal Hospitals, CNOA, the International Faith Based Coalition, and “Citizens Against Legalizing Marijuana” were all selected to speak in opposition to the Adult Use of Marijuana Act. While messages varied, our side was able to present clear, concise, and targeted messages against the ballot measure. The hearing heated up when Assemblymember Bill Quirk challenged the validity of a statement made by CNOA lobbyist and Cal Chiefs Senior Policy Advisor John Lovell regarding language in the initiative that prohibits the licensing agency from denying a marijuana license solely because the applicant has a drug felony. As a result of the accusation, the lawyer behind the initiative, John Lovell, and the Legislative Analyst’s Office were all summoned to the panel. To no one’s surprise, Mr. Lovell was correct, and the Legislative Analyst’s Office’s representative concluded that, “I do think that the language here is pretty clear that these convictions for these specific trafficking offenses is not enough to be the sole condition for denial.”

One unexpected result of the hearing was the number of emails and calls our office received thanking us for our comments and asking about the opposition campaign. To say that our objections to the initiative sparked interested would be an understatement, and we are hopeful that our successes on Tuesday will allow our coalition against the initiative to grow.

Marijuana discussions, however, did not end on Tuesday. On Thursday, the campaign met with the Office of the Attorney General to discuss her “title and summary” of the initiative. The wording of the title and summary is crucial, as it has the power to influence how voters decide to vote. Including negative components in the initiative helps sway voters in our direction, while including positive components in the initiative sways voters towards the proponents. The campaign presented the Attorney General’s staff with letters from cannabis cultivators, medical professors at the University of San Francisco, Cal Chiefs, CPOA, CNOA, Code Enforcement, and the California Hospitals highlighting the pitfalls of the initiative, as well as recommended changes to the title and summary. Our hour-long discussion resulted in a positive conversation about the need to have a balanced description of the initiative that educates voters about the specific components included in this 68-page ballot measure. We are hopeful that our voices, and the voices expressed in the letters, will positively impact the title and summary for the Adult Use of Marijuana Act.

As always, if you have any questions about our work on this campaign or our legislative efforts, please do not hesitate to contact our office.