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The aroma of freshly lit cannabis already was present as Nick Zettell, president of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, warned the crowd not to smoke and that [police were watching](#).

Police reported multiple marijuana-related arrests but didn't have a complete tally as of early Saturday afternoon.

But beyond the smoke screen at Hash Bash, there was a deeper political message this year. For the first time in 41 years, activists are collecting signatures to amend Michigan's Constitution and repeal marijuana prohibition for adults 21 and older.

"I salute you, Ann Arbor. I salute you, Michigan — for being on the front lines in this struggle," said keynote speaker **Steve DeAngelo**, director of the Harborside Health Center in Oakland, Calif., and star of the "Weed Wars" TV show.

DeAngelo has been active in the national cannabis reform movement for nearly four decades, both in Washington, D.C., and in California, and he heads up one of the largest medical marijuana dispensaries in the nation.

He encouraged a crowd of more than 5,000 to keep fighting.

"I know you've had a tough time here in Michigan," he said. "Like many other places, the voters of Michigan passed a law fully expecting it would be implemented, fully expecting that our elected officials and our law enforcement officers would respect the will of the voters."

Organizers of the campaign who spoke at the rally said the ballot question they're pushing is a direct response to interference by state officials to implement Michigan's Medical Marijuana Act, as well as increasing legal actions against state-registered patients and caregivers.

Speakers at the rally had choice words for Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette, who has argued the voter-approved medical marijuana law does not authorize dispensaries. He has supported efforts by prosecutors and local governments to shut down dispensaries.

DeAngelo's speech was heavily politicized and targeted Schuette and the Midland-based Dow Chemical Co. He accused Schuette of being in bed with the global chemical giant and said Dow has been terrified for years that the world will learn that cannabis-



Steve DeAngelo tells the crowd of about 5,500 people to keep fighting for marijuana reform.

Ryan J. Stanton | AnnArbor.com

based medicine is more effective, less expensive and has fewer side effects than chemical pharmaceuticals.

DeAngelo characterized the war on marijuana as failed policy, and said it's a waste of government resources and makes victims of innocent people.

"Let's look at it. Their system spends billions and billions of dollars to criminalize one of the most beneficial and useful plants Mother Nature has bequeathed to us," he said, adding it's a system that forces people to buy marijuana on the streets.

"Our system provides patients a safe place to get their medicine," he said. "A place where patients can be confident that the medicine they purchase has been tested."

DeAngelo left the crowd with words of encouragement. "The darkest moment comes before the dawn," he said, "and that's where we're at now."

The Hash Bash rally on the Diag began in 1972 after local activist John Sinclair was sentenced to 10 years on prison for selling two joints to an undercover narcotics agent. The Michigan Supreme Court declared the law used to convict Sinclair unconstitutional and since then the annual gathering has focused on the goal of reforming marijuana laws.

Long-time Hash Bash organizer Adam Brook is currently serving a two-year prison sentence for a weapons violation, so this year's event was organized by three local drug policy reform activists: long-time Ann Arbor activist Chuck Ream, Zettell of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and Michigan Moms United to End the War on Drugs founder Charmie Gholson.

Gholson and Ream co-emceed the event.

Ream offered his take on Brook's two-year prison sentence.



"He's in jail because he's the emcee of Hash Bash and he went to Oakland County," Ream said. "That's a mistake."

Ream called Hash Bash a celebration of "the magical miracle plant that we love — the holy ganja that gives us a glimpse of heaven right here on Earth."

"And second, the Hash Bash is a fierce protest, a scream of patriotic outrage at the immoral policy of destroying the lives of American citizens through cannabis prohibition — over 800,000 people every year," Ream said. "Every 37 seconds one of us is taken down and we lose the liberty that Star-Spangled Banner just promised us, and it has to stop."