

Seminar on City wide Cannabis Reform Initiatives in Michigan

Dec 16, 2012 Gone Wired Café, Lansing

Michigan Cannabis Law Reform Activists 1:00 PM

Victories in Michigan cities have brought our cannabis movement forward. Five citywide Medical Marijuana initiatives (Detroit, Ann Arbor, Flint, Ferndale, and Traverse City) preceded Michigan getting the money from MPP to put Medical Marijuana on the statewide ballot, where we won with nearly 63% of the vote. **Our medical marijuana law in Michigan began with repeated local wins.**

It has been a joy and something of a protection to have our new medical marijuana law in Michigan, and Tim and I are happy to have made it possible. I am personally thankful to Tim for his incredible tenacity and skill. His work set the stage for our Michigan Medical Marijuana Act. Hopefully **we will set the stage for further victory.**

November 6, 2012 brought us **statewide** legalization in Colorado and Washington. Many **city victories** in those states preceded these historic, victorious legalization efforts.

In Michigan, November 6, 2012 brought us five tremendous victories. We believe that electoral victories can continue to take our movement forward, even in the “non election year” of 2013. (Question: What elections are available in Michigan in 2013?)

On Nov. 6, **by decisive margins**, we won an “exemption” from the cannabis law in Detroit (65%) and Flint (57%) for adults in possession of less than an ounce. In conservative Grand Rapids (59%) a brilliant campaign made cannabis possession a civil infraction (you get a ticket), like in Ann Arbor. In Kalamazoo (over 64%) voters approved allowing three medical marijuana dispensaries (while, on the same day, every dispensary initiative in California cities failed). Ypsilanti (74.5%) i voters approved making cannabis law enforcement the Lowest Law Enforcement Priority of their city police department.

Every one of these victories took a lot of work and money – then more hard work and money- and a person or persons who said “I am going to do whatever it takes to get this done”. It takes signatures of real registered voters of your city on your petition. **You have to either get them yourselves or pay people** who know how to do that very difficult work. In my mind the only real hero in our movement is the man or woman who is willing to work to get strangers to sign on to our petitions. Don’t begin this work without the attitude that you will do whatever it takes to win.

These victories give our movement tremendous forward momentum. They prove that the average voter does not support cannabis prohibition anymore. They move history forward. We are proving that voters (whether for moral or fiscal reasons) don’t agree with the egregiously brutal treatment of many cannabis consumers in our great state. If we can generate victories in 2013, a “non election year” we will greatly add to the momentum for cannabis law reform.

This is for cities only! We know no way that you can create a ballot initiative for cannabis law reform in a township, a village, or a county. Ballot initiatives for cities are authorized or enabled by MCL (Michigan

Compiled Laws) 117.21 through 117.25, a part, I think, of the Michigan Home Rule City At of 1909 as amended. Find it, print it, and memorize it – it is your blueprint. It takes the valid signatures of 5% if the registered voters in the city to get onto the ballot. Doing a citywide initiative is both very easy (you know exactly what you have to do) and extremely difficult (you have to actually get those signatures). Each signature is a separate human interaction, and a victory in itself.

And Justin
Tim and I are the Safer Michigan Coalition, and we are proud to have a safermichcoalition e-mail list made up of the most serious political people working on cannabis law reform in Michigan. It is free, and by invitation. If you are going to be involved with a local initiative we hope very much that you will be on the safermichcoalition list. We try to keep it oriented to politics and information, not chat.

I (we) are happy today to teach others how to do local initiatives in Michigan, which has been termed the “death by 1000 cuts” strategy. We can see the beginning of the end of cannabis prohibition. We know how **important it is to keep providing exactly the right opportunities for voters to keep on showing that they don’t support brutal treatment for cannabis consumers any longer.**

Clearly you want to “win before you start” by carefully choosing the city you plan to work in. Look at past voting. Is the city heavily Democrat? By what percentage did its voters approve medical marijuana in 2008?

Carefully choose which sort of cannabis reform initiative you want to sponsor, and think how it will play in the city you are contemplating. Remember that **you have three options** (and remember that, to the media and politicians “a win is a win”, whether it is for the “exemption” of one ounce or less, dispensaries, or Lowest Law Enforcement Priority (LLEP).

These are your three cannabis law reform options:

1)Decrim, or “exemption” for the possession of one ounce or less by an adult

2)Dispensaries

3) Lowest Law Enforcement Priority We have **petition templates** for all 3

After you choose your goal you have two ways to approach putting it on the ballot:

1)As an amendment to the city charter

2) As a new or changed ordinance

To decide this latter question you may want to examine the ordinances of the city you are considering. See if there is a procedure for changing an ordinance or adding a new one.

What are the signature requirements in the city charter for adding or amending an **ordinance** by a voter initiated ballot process (if such a thing is allowed in your city)? Compare the requirements for getting an **ordinance change** on the ballot compared with the requirements for getting a **city charter amendment** on the ballot. (5% of registered voters). A charter amendment may be more permanent.

Another major decision is whether or not to validate your signatures.

You may want to know where you stand in relation to your signature target; or you may think your resources are best spent on simply trying to maximize your number of signatures. Validate if you can! Our Flint and Ypsilanti campaigns this year generated reasons why you should validate!

Get the list of registered voters from the city clerk. Check you signatures against that list. Your validator has to be a serious person and give reports within a day or two after signatures are turned in.

You will probably have to pay for signatures, although you can try to get some from volunteers. You should realize that you will probably end up spending about \$3 for a valid signature.

You can try to create a real organization and operate in a proper political manner (do fund raising, cultivate local supporters in the power structure, have a media strategy & letters to the editor, create a team of volunteers, identify supporters, call supporters and/or provide rides on election day), **or not.**

We probably have our victory in Grand Rapids because organizers did so much real traditional political work. We had very little campaign in our other victories. If you don't have a real organization or cash for a campaign then you had better pick your city even more carefully. **We can't afford to lose one of these campaigns.**

In city ballot campaigns that I have run, like the LLEP in Kalamazoo last year or the Ypsilanti and Kalamazoo campaigns this year there was no real community organizing or support from the power structure. We did:

***a simple presentation with a good panel of speakers at the downtown public library about two weeks before the vote,**

***got great signs for polling places on Election Day, and**

***sent a few notices to media.**

That's it - and we still won almost 2 to 1.

So, **it is your choice** to be an actor in history, or not. This is our time. We can pile up victories, if we do it right.

It is a hard road to do a local initiative, you will be apprehensive on voting day, and when you win it will be the sweetest high you ever experienced. You will have a real world victory that nobody can ever take away.

We are lucky in Michigan to have a way to do these local city initiatives and we should keep doing them. This is the only way we have, on a low budget, to prove that Americans don't support cannabis prohibition anymore. (2013 elections, Feb. 26, May 7, Aug. 6, Nov. 5...check it)

Soon, as has happened with medical, our local initiatives will point the way to major cannabis law reform at the state level.

Further thoughts:

Show **total constant respect for the voters**, the wisdom of the voters, and the democratic process.

When somebody asks you "Why should I support this" **remember your HEAD and your HEART**. Your wise voters will support the initiative because they are **smart enough** to know that cannabis isn't harmful, and they **have enough empathy** to not want to see lives, families and homes destroyed by the needlessly brutal drug war.

Know that some people will not petition even when they say they will. It takes a very special superhero to hold a cannabis petition and approach a stranger – but all of our progress is based on this act. Be ready to pay top people to get signatures.

If **you start early you can evaluate signatures and pay petitioners a week later, by check**. If you get started late you will incur more cost and end up paying piles of your cash out of your pocket. Both ways work.

Become a notary public right now. Petitions must be notarized, and you want to be able to do that "in house". It is super easy to become a notary, but don't postpone this, do it now.

Eight new people joined the safermichcoalition list.

It appears the Brad has also set up a list for those doing local campaigns during 2013.

So far we have a number of possible 2013 campaigns. Let's create victory!, Chuck

NEW

And we won Lansing, Jackson and Ferndale in 2013. Now, WHAT FOR 2014?