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Members of the Washtenaw Coalition for Compassionate Care walked to Ann Arbor City Hall last Thursday to deliver a petition containing more than 7,000 signatures in support of the legal use of medicinal marijuana. (FOREST CASEY/Daily)

## Initiative legalizing medicinal marijuana may be on Nov. ballot

Kate Tomkie, Daily Staff Reporter  
May 10, 2004

After collecting almost 7,000 signatures in support of decriminalizing marijuana for medical use, members of the Washtenaw Coalition for Compassionate Care marched from the Arbor Brewing Company to the city clerk's office last Friday to turn in the petition.

With the help of the University's chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, the coalition has collected almost twice the 4,170 valid signatures legally required by the city.

Now, they may finally see the medicinal marijuana initiative on the ballot in November if the city clerk's office approves the petition.

The petition asks voters to support amendments to the Ann Arbor charter that would prohibit the city from fining residents for possessing marijuana when it is recommended by a physician and used for medical treatment. The petition also asks that fines for marijuana use be capped at \$100, currently the minimum amount for possession of the drug.

Charles Ream, chairman of the Washtenaw Coalition for Compassionate Care, said he has spent the last year collecting petitions from Ann Arbor residents.

"Ann Arbor is a progressive town, and I know people want this to work," said Ream, citing the recent passing of the medical marijuana initiative in Burlington, Vt. as an example for Ann Arbor to follow.

But Ream added that getting the initiative on the ballot would be an uphill battle.

He claimed the fight for medical marijuana reform was dealt a blow three years ago when a city clerk gave the Washtenaw County Libertarians the wrong deadline to turn in their petitions.

On a larger scale, the initiative faces opposition from those who fear the drug may become too accessible to minors and those using it for non-medical purposes.

The Bush administration also opposes the decriminalization of marijuana for medical use.

Rackham student Evan Samuel said he opposes the initiative because it may cause dependency on the drug.

"People have other prescriptions available to them that do the same things. They use

marijuana for things like stomachaches because they've been using it for years and it has become a crutch for them," Samuel said.

Despite former setbacks and opposition, supporters such as Tim Beck — a member of the Detroit Coalition for Compassionate Care — attended the march.

"I know Ann Arbor, and I think this is going to pass overwhelmingly. This is merely a culture war," said Beck.

Beck also helped put the medical marijuana initiative on the ballot in Detroit — an issue the city will vote on this August.

Ann Arbor resident Madeleine Borthwick came out to listen to Ream, Beck and others speak before the petition was turned in. Borthwick, who awaits gallbladder surgery and suffers from severe pain, sleeplessness and nausea, takes marijuana medicinally and said she prefers it to other medicines.

"Between marijuana and acid reducer, I have to admit the marijuana just works better," said Borthwick, who is eager for the initiative to pass in Ann Arbor.

"We would be able to smoke (marijuana) in our apartments without worrying about the cops or neighbors finding out. We would have the right to do what we want to do in the privacy of our own home," she added.

Borthwick said she would continue to use marijuana medicinally, risking fines and court dates.

"I'll stop smoking marijuana when they pull the sheet up over my head," she said.