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Hamburg, McCowen to develop medical MJ dispensary regulation ordinance

By **TIFFANY REVELLE** The Daily Journal

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Developing regulations for medical marijuana dispensaries will be the focus of an ad-hoc committee appointed Tuesday by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors.

The board appointed 2nd District Supervisor John McCowen and 5th District Supervisor Dan Hamburg to the committee, which will be tasked with developing an ordinance that would contain the regulations.

Several members of the medical marijuana community showed up in support and to lend their expertise for the committee, while others expressed skepticism.

"We are gathering members here along the coast and up here in the Emerald Triangle (Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties), and we're very excited about it, and we would like to participate," said Dan Rush, who identified himself as the director of the medical cannabis and hemp division of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

He said the group recommended MendoGrown, an association for growers and others in the medical marijuana community, and the union, be involved in the committee.

Rush said he's also a "medical cannabis commissioner" in Berkeley and on a medical marijuana task force in San Francisco.

"There is a lot of legislation -- there are new Attorney General guidelines being drafted; there's a lot of stuff going on that we are currently up on, so I think that we could bring a lot of experience to this commission," he said.

Matt Cohen of MendoGrown and Northstone

Organics called the proposition of forming regulations for dispensaries a "wonderful idea."

Gabriel Martin, who identified himself as the managing director of the Leonard Moore Co-op and Patient Resource Center in Mendocino, supported the development of regulations and offered his help.

Terry Johnson identified herself as the director of Compassionate Heart Mutual Benefit Association north of Ukiah, and as the spokeswoman for the Mendocino Medical Cannabis Collective Association (MMCCA), a burgeoning group consisting of patients, caregivers and directors of medical marijuana collectives.

She said the group provides safe access to more than 10,000 local patients.

"(Our) members have ... contributed to the general economy by creating real jobs, meaning more income taxes paid, and workmen's comp, and Social Security taxes, and FICA, and, well, you get it," said Johnson. "We are determined to be not only legal, but to be good, positive, law-abiding role models for our patient members and the community at large."

She added a word of caution "that it would not be prudent to balance the county's budget solely on the backs of our patients, who, for the most part, are not wealthy people. I know my patients already pay higher than street prices for their medicine just because they want to be legal and safe."



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Johnson concluded by saying the MMCCA hopes to work with the committee to ensure safe access to medical marijuana.

A man who identified himself as "Professor Pingpong" called "bogus" the idea that anyone who grows or distributes medical marijuana shouldn't be able to make a profit. Such regulations, he said, would eliminate small competitors in the industry.

Sally Pringle, a self-described advocate for medical marijuana patients and patients' rights, also ended her comments by offering her help as a business woman.

"We already all know that this is one of the biggest, high-traffic marijuana counties, ... and it's moving out of here, and the county is not getting their fair share. And it's not just about law enforcement, it's about the public health department and the department of agriculture, and those dollars being distributed fairly amongst the people," Pringle said.

County Counsel Jeanine Nadel prepared an ordinance for a Health and Human Services committee, which tabled the discussion in 2009 to instead finish work on the county's medical marijuana cultivation ordinance, County Code Chapter 9.31.

Dispensaries only need to get a business license to open, and there are about 10 of them in the county, according to Nadel.

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