

Maryland's medical marijuana bill suffers setback

State's top health official voices concerns

By David Hill

The Washington Times

6:44 p.m., Tuesday, March 1, 2011



A Maryland lawmaker is attempting to salvage a bill that would legalize medical marijuana after the state's top health official testified that provisions regulating the drug's use and distribution were inadequate.

Delegate [Dan K. Morhaim](#), Baltimore County Democrat and the bill's co-sponsor, said he is working to address concerns raised Monday by [Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein](#), secretary of Maryland's [Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#) (DHMH).

[Dr. Sharfstein](#) testified at a House [Judiciary Committee](#) hearing that although he thinks the state eventually could make marijuana available to residents with many severe illnesses, it first needs to determine how to fund and supervise such a program.

He said he remains concerned about the drug's potential negative effects, such as memory loss and pregnancy complications, and he called for "at least several years" of research and planning before the drug is made available in the state.

Maryland [Gov. Martin O'Malley](#), a Democrat, in the past has shown reservations about the legalization of medical marijuana. His office said Tuesday that [Dr. Sharfstein](#)'s concerns were "legitimate."

[Mr. Morhaim](#), the House's only medical doctor, said it was uncertain whether the bill's supporters could address [Dr. Sharfstein](#)'s concerns before the end of this year's [General Assembly](#) session, scheduled for April 11.

"I'm happy to work with the health secretary, and we'll all work hard to see what we can accomplish this year," he said. "We want to have the best product possible that does the most good."

The House appeared poised this year to pass a medical marijuana bill after it allowed a similar bill passed last year by the [Senate](#) to stall. This year's House bill had 61 sponsors, just 10 short of the 71 votes needed for passage.

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have legalized medical marijuana.

[Mr. Morhaim](#) has worked to legalize medical marijuana for the past two years, arguing it has been shown to reduce pain, nausea and loss of appetite in patients undergoing chemotherapy and suffering from such diseases as AIDS, cancer and multiple sclerosis. His bill would allow patients to receive medical prescriptions for marijuana and acquire it from certified dispensaries and pharmacies. [DHMH](#) and the state Department of Agriculture would oversee growth and distribution of the drug.

The blunt criticism from [Dr. Sharfstein](#), appointed to the O'[Malley](#) administration in January after serving as a deputy commissioner at the Food and Drug Administration, took many observers by surprise. His predecessor, John Colmers, took no official position on the bill passed by the [Senate](#) last year.

While [Dr. Sharfstein](#) acknowledged reports of the drug's positive effects and praised the bill's efforts to regulate distribution, he said more research is needed to determine whether such regulation is feasible and whether the drug's positives outweigh its negatives.

© Copyright 2011 The Washington Times, LLC.

Retrieved March 4, 2011 from

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/mar/1/marylands-medical-marijuana-bill-suffers-setback/>

Maryland Politics

News and Notes on Politics in Annapolis and the D.C. Suburbs

The Washington Post

Posted at 4:00 PM ET, 02/28/2011

O'Malley administration opposes medical marijuana bill

By Ann Marimow

Gov. Martin O'Malley's chief public health adviser Monday dealt a potentially fatal blow to efforts to legalize medical marijuana in Maryland, opposing [legislation under consideration](#) in the General Assembly in part because he said it does "does not provide for meaningful limits."

Joshua M. Sharfstein, secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said the proposal does not sufficiently limit the number of dispensaries, quantity of marijuana or types of conditions for which marijuana can be recommended by a doctor. The health department's analysis also found that it would cost several million dollars and take at least several years to set up a state program. Sharfstein suggested launching a study to come up with an alternative.

The position was a reversal for the O'Malley administration, which last year supported a similar bill before Sharfstein -- the [former second-in-command at the Food and Drug Administration](#) -- joined the department and conducted a more thorough analysis.



The legislation has broad bipartisan support, and [Maryland would join 15 states and the District of Columbia in allowing marijuana use](#) for medical purposes. But at a joint House committee hearing Monday, lawmakers expressed concerns about the interplay with federal law and how to ensure that the drug is being used for medical --not recreational -- purposes.

Del. Dan. K. Morhaim (D-Baltimore County), the bill's sponsor and a physician, called the administration's analysis flawed and overblown, and said the proposal ensures that the marijuana would be used for "bona fide medical purposes only."

"While we debate and wait, more of our fellow citizens suffer," said Morhaim, who told Sharfstein he was open to working together to address the administration's concerns.

"It's been plenty hard to get this through. I don't know what's going to happen this session," he said.

Morhaim was joined by Sen. David R. Brinkley (R-Frederick), a Senate sponsor, who made a personal appeal as a former cancer patient, and by other patients who have used marijuana to cope with the side effects from cancer treatments such as nausea and appetite loss.

By Ann Marimow | February 28, 2011; 4:00 PM ET

Retrieved March 4, 2011 from

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/annapolis/2011/02/gov_martin_omalley_s_chief_publ.html
