

Assembly Bill Would Allow Medical Cannabis on School Campuses

It's back-to-school season across the country, but a bill passed late last month by the California Assembly is focused on an item that has historically been kept at least 1,000 feet away from schools.

California may have been the first state to legalize medical marijuana, but it is not on the list of first states to allow students in need access to medical cannabis on campus (unlike Colorado, Maine, and New Jersey, for instance).

Although California parents have been allowed to give their children medical marijuana under state law for more than 20 years, it has been unequivocally banned from school grounds. Therefore, parents have had to make arrangements to pull their kids out of the school day in order to administer the necessary dose.

Judge issues temporary order that allows kindergartener to attend class

Democratic Senator Jerry Hill started the ball rolling on this bill after a teen in his district made it known that without medical cannabis, he could experience as many as 50 seizures in a single day. Hill sees this legislation as a step toward improving the lives of minors facing extreme medical challenges. The measure is now on Governor Jerry Brown's desk.

And in a temporary ruling, a judge has decided to allow a five-year-old girl in Santa Rosa to attend kindergarten while receiving cannabis oil on campus. According to The Press Democrat, Brooke Adams suffers from Dravet syndrome, a genetic, rare, and chronic condition that causes recurrent seizures. Brooke's treatment includes daily doses of THC oil and cannabidiol (also known as CBD).

Jana Adams, Brooke's mother, said that in addition to the daily dosage, Brooke needs to keep the THC oil with her so that if and when signs of a seizure emerge, her daughter can quickly apply the oil to her gums and prevent the seizure from taking hold.

Over the summer, the Rincon Valley Union School District, pointing to state and federal prohibition of medical cannabis in schools, rejected Adams's request to allow her daughter to bring the CBD oil onto school grounds. Adams took her complaint to court, where Judge Charles Marson issued a temporary order that permits Brooke's THC oil on campus while he reaches his final ruling. The temporary order stipulates that the school district arrange for a nurse to administer the medication when Brooke needs it.

In an interview on KQED radio, Jana Adams said that Brooke began having severe seizures when she was just three months old (some seizures persisting for as long as three hours). Soon after her first birthday, Brooke had a medical marijuana card in her name, and her mother attributes the fact that Brooke experiences fewer seizures today to all her medications (of which the CBD oil is one).

Schools risk losing federal funding if marijuana makes its way on campus

Cathy Myhers is the assistant superintendent for student services with the Rincon Valley School District. She also spoke to KQED prior to the temporary order, and explained the catch-22 from the school administration's perspective. She noted that because state and federal laws prohibit cannabis products anywhere near schools, if

Rincon Valley allowed Brooke to have her THC medication at school, the district could jeopardize its federal funding.

Later speaking to the San Francisco Chronicle, Myhers said: "Rincon Valley would like to see the restrictions changed so that students with disabilities who require medical marijuana to be administered during the school day per a physician's (recommendation) can attend appropriate public school campuses, just as any other student would be able to do."

Dr. Joseph Sullivan is director of the Pediatric Epilepsy Center at UCSF's Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco. "If we're really looking for what's in the best interest of the child," he said to the San Francisco Chronicle, "we're not asking the school to do anything evasive. It's essentially doing something that a parent feels comfortable doing at home."

On-campus cannabis: subject to restrictions

The bill passed by the state Assembly stipulates that any cannabis product on school grounds cannot be in a form that requires smoking (therefore, it would need to be in an oil or in a capsule). Further, the cannabis product would only be allowed for students with a medical marijuana card.

Rather than forcing school districts to permit medical marijuana on school campuses, however, the legislation would allow districts to opt out of the policy if they so choose.

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