

Drug Policy Alliance (DPA), Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP), Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), Americans for Safe Access (ASA), Veterans for Medical Cannabis Access, and Arizona Medical Cannabis Nurses Association:

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**Arizona State Senator Blocks Funding for
Long-Sought Medical Marijuana Research**

Clinical Trial for Veterans with PTSD Has Already Obtained Approval from U.S. Food and Drug Administration, University of Arizona Institutional Review Board, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Wednesday, April 2:

Veterans, Military Family Members and Supporters to Rally at Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza

After 22 years of hard-fought efforts, the non-profit pharmaceutical company Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) has finally obtained approval from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for a FDA clinical trial to examine the medical safety and efficacy of marijuana. The trial would study military veterans suffering from treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet the study's ability to receive Arizona state funding is in jeopardy due to State Senator Kimberly Yee.

Arizona has collected millions of dollars from its medical marijuana program. Under Arizona's medical marijuana law, that money is reserved for furthering the provisions of the law and should include research and education – but none of it has been spent. A bill being considered by lawmakers would give the Arizona Department of Health Services discretion to use some of this surplus funding to study the medical benefits of marijuana. On March 10th, the bill HB 2333, sponsored by State Representative Ethan Orr of Tucson, passed the Arizona House 52-5, with strong bi-partisan support. But State Senator Kimberly Yee (Phoenix), who chairs the Senate Education Committee, refused to put the bill on her committee's agenda before the March 20th deadline – saying only that she wanted the funds to be directed for drug abuse prevention.

“This bill will help a lot of people. Not just combat veterans, but people with chronic illness and pain who can't find relief anywhere else. Whether you are for recreational use or against it, we should at least know what marijuana does. It's research – that's all we are trying to do,” said the bill's sponsor, State Representative Ethan Orr.

HB 2333 would allow for protected funds, which currently total more than \$6M and are collected through the sales of medical marijuana cards to qualified patients in Arizona, to be allocated for study in a university setting “with the intent to conduct thorough, objective clinical research on the safety, efficacy and adverse events with marijuana.” The study would support the Arizona economy, as it requires all studies to be conducted in state. The bill fixes a problem facing administrators of the Medical Marijuana Act who are restricted to using funds specifically in furtherance of the Act. HB2333 does not cost tax payers any money – rather, it would put existing money to work for the betterment of Arizona.

"Our study paves the way for research that could make marijuana into a federally approved prescription medicine for PTSD," says MAPS executive director Rick Doblin, Ph.D. "We worked for 22 years to get permission to purchase marijuana from NIDA's monopoly supply. By refusing to consider HB 2333, Senator Yee is making it clear that she would prefer the research never to happen at all."

Veterans like Ricardo Pereyda of Tucson, who fought in combat in Operation Iraqi Freedom 2, are angry that Senator Yee wouldn't allow the bill to be heard in her committee. “Being able to treat multiple symptoms from post-traumatic stress with cannabis has been instrumental in my ability to lead a full and productive life,” said Pereyda, “Senator Yee is placing politics before science, and doing so at the expense of our combat veterans.” Pereyda served in the U.S. Army and Military Police Corps, and is the Veterans Liaison for Arizona NORML.

In response to this anti-democratic action by Sen. Yee, Pereyda is leading a coalition effort to bring veterans, military family members and other Arizonans who support medical marijuana research together at the Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza on April 2nd from 5pm to 7pm. Advocates are asking for Arizona State Senate President Andy Biggs to bring the bill to the Senate floor for a vote, thereby bypassing the need for a hearing in committee.

WHAT: A Rally in Support of Medical Marijuana Research for PTSD Treatment

WHEN: Wednesday, April 2nd, from 5pm-7pm

WHERE: Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza, Phoenix, Arizona

SPEAKERS:

- Ricardo Pereyda, Iraq War Combat Veteran, Veterans Liaison for Arizona NORML
- Former State Representative, Ruben Gallego, USMC Veteran
- Scott Cecil, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Arizona State University
- Heather Manus, RN, Arizona Medical Cannabis Nurses Association
- Retired Lieutenant Police Officer Tony Ryan, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition
- Dr. Sue Sisley, University of Arizona, Principal Investigator of PTSD Study

Dr. Sue Sisley of the University of Arizona, who is the principal investigator of the proposed study, is also frustrated with the inaction of Senator Yee. "Twenty-two veterans a day are killing themselves," said Dr. Sue Sisley, "They're not benefiting from conventional medicine. And while many are using marijuana to help them with this debilitating disorder, they want it to be legitimized. They want data. They want to know what doses to take. They want to be able to

discuss this with their doctors. The Obama administration is hearing this, because allowing us to do this study does represent a major shift in policy."

"Cannabis medicine is natural, gentle, non-toxic, and should be available to PTSD sufferers in Arizona," said Heather Manus, president of the Arizona Cannabis Nurses Association. "Many PTSD patients in neighboring states are successfully finding relief of symptoms through the use of cannabis." The AZCNA has filed a petition with the Arizona Department of Health Services on behalf of veterans and other PTSD sufferers to add PTSD as a debilitating condition under the state's medical marijuana law.

"It is unthinkable that someone would stand in the way of medical research, particularly research could benefit military veterans, first responders, and victims of violent crime, yet that is precisely what Senator Yee has done by blocking HB 2333," said Steph Sherer, executive director of Americans for Safe Access.

"Our veterans put their lives on the line for this country, and now Senator Yee says that rather than pursuing every option to address the problems many of them face, we should instead force these proud soldiers into an illicit marketplace, and turn them into criminals for trying to make themselves whole. It's a shameful way to treat our veterans, and worse, will force many not to pursue treatment at all," said 36-year police veteran Lt. Tony Ryan (Ret), a board member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, a group of law enforcement officials opposed to the war on drugs.

"Senator Yee's refusal to allow this medical research for veterans harms not just veterans and their families, but all Arizonans who have loved ones who suffer with post-traumatic stress," said Jon Gettel of NORML. "It's an outrage to prevent this important research."

Another supporter of this event is the Drug Policy Alliance's Freedom to Choose campaign, which advocates for veterans' access to medical marijuana. "Veterans deserve the freedom to choose the safest treatment for their debilitating conditions. When our veterans come home they deserve access to the medicine that works for them," said Jessica Gelay, who is the policy coordinator for DPA's New Mexico office and the coordinator of the Freedom to Choose campaign. "It is unconscionable that research that could help prevent the needless deaths of men and women who have already sacrificed so much would be blocked by one lawmaker."

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