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On Thursday, the Board of Directors of the League of California Cities voted to co-sponsor legislation to improve the regulation of medical cannabis in a manner that protects local control, addresses important public safety concerns, and enhances health and safety standards. The legislation, Senate Bill 1262, is sponsored by the California Police Chiefs Association and authored by Senator Lou Correa, a veteran legislator who has a long history of working with law enforcement organizations as well as local government. SB 1262 will for the first time provide a clear road map for the responsible implementation of Proposition 215 in California, since voters approved it in 1996.

Recent events in the medical marijuana arena have compelled both the California Police Chiefs Association and the League of California Cities to re-evaluate our longstanding respective positions of unconditional opposition to legislation on this issue. In 2013, our organizations joined forces to defeat no fewer than four bills in the California Legislature that sought to regulate medical marijuana. We opposed each of the bills over concerns they would have preempted local control, ignored significant public safety concerns, and failed to address important health and safety issues. While each measure was defeated, those victories were hard-won and achieved with increasingly slender margins. One bill, AB 604, failed by only two votes on the Senate Floor.

We could also not ignore that the political landscape on this issue was shifting. In August 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a memorandum stating that it would refrain from enforcing the federal Controlled Substances Act as it applied to medical marijuana, so long as dispensary operators were in compliance with state and local laws, and were not selling to or facilitating transfers to minors. In the fall of 2013, the Public Policy Institute of California released a poll indicating that 60 percent of likely California voters supported legalization. These developments indicate a changing attitude toward marijuana on the part of the federal government and California's voting public.

Our two organizations independently came to realize that although we remain strongly opposed to marijuana use, it is increasingly likely that in the near future some statewide regulatory structure for medical marijuana could be enacted. We also realized that without our proactive intervention it could take a form that was severely damaging to our interests.

This proposal, which has been carefully vetted with city attorneys, police chiefs, and the League's Public Safety Policy Committee, provides what California has lacked since the passage of Proposition 215 in 1996: a reasonable public safety and health-based approach to implementing this proposition in a state with great size and diversity.

In anticipation of the many likely questions on this issue, the League will host an educational webinar for its members at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, February 25, 2014. Please see the included invitation for further details.

We look forward to working this year to obtain needed improvements in medical marijuana regulation.

Sincerely,

Chris McKenzie
Executive Director
League of California Cities

Kim Raney
President
California Police Chiefs Association