



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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## For Immediate Release

February 6, 2016

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## **Erpenbach and Taylor: Let the Public Decide on Medical Marijuana**

Introduces legislation calling for statewide referendum

MADISON – Today, Sen. Jon Erpenbach (D-Middleton) and Rep. Chris Taylor (D-Madison) introduced two pieces of medical marijuana legislation that had been circulating for co-sponsorship last month – the Compassionate Cannabis Care Act and legislation that would authorize a non-binding statewide referendum on legalizing medical marijuana. Joined by local physician Dr. David Olive, also currently undergoing treatment for stage 4 lung cancer, and Iraq War veteran Steve Acheson, Erpenbach and Taylor called on Republican leadership to advance their legislation immediately given two major health care crises currently facing Wisconsin – opiate abuse and needed mental health services for our veterans battling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Twenty-eight states have legalized marijuana for medicinal purposes, including Wisconsin's neighbors Minnesota, Michigan and Illinois. Proven effective at reducing opiate abuse, a 2016 University of Michigan study found patients using medical marijuana to treat chronic pain reported a 64 percent reduction in their use of opioid painkillers. In addition, a 2014 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found states with legalized medical marijuana saw a 25 percent cut in opioid overdose deaths.

“When facing a growing opioid epidemic in Wisconsin, why on earth would we ignore a viable, commonsense solution that has been shown to dramatically reduce opioid abuse? Furthermore, why are we denying our veterans, who served our country and were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, access to the medical care they say they need?” Taylor asked. “While I am disappointed that my Republican colleagues have chosen to believe misinformation and outdated rhetoric, I sincerely hope they have the courage to listen to the people of Wisconsin who for years have supported medical marijuana and learn more about proposals by including our bills in their Special Session on opiate abuse.”

Erpenbach and Taylor introduced their Compassionate Cannabis Care Act last session, but it did not receive a public hearing in either house. This session, the two Dane County elected officials included a new proposal that would authorize a non-binding statewide referendum on whether to legalize medical marijuana. Several high-profile Republicans have previously expressed public support for similar referendums – including Governor Scott Walker. Recent national polling from May 2016 shows that 89 percent of Americans support medical marijuana.

“While there has been a dramatic shift in public opinion on medical marijuana, I understand why some of my colleagues remain cautious. As elected officials, we are sent to Madison to represent our constituents. I am confident a statewide referendum would provide Governor Walker and legislators across Wisconsin with the support and peace of mind needed to advance this legislation. At a minimum, allow the public's voices to be heard,” Erpenbach concluded.

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