

Activist Training Guide

Texas NORML – A Preparation for the 2017 Legislative Session

The only way to change marijuana laws in Texas is through the legislature. The Texas House of Representatives and Senate meet every two years for approximately 140 days.

It is an intense process, upwards of 10,000 bills being filed during the average session. Each bill must first be introduced by a House and/or Senate Member with as many co-sponsors as possible. Next, the bill will be assigned to a committee based on the code of law it would modify. The committee may hold a hearing with public testimony and vote to move the bill forward to the Calendars Committee (in the House) or the Senate Administration Committee (in the Senate), who may then schedule the bill for a debate by the full House and/or Senate members, with the goal of reaching a favorable vote by a majority of the legislators in the chamber it was filed in. That process must happen in both the House and Senate before it moves on to the lieutenant governor and then governor's desk to be signed, enacted by default or vetoed.

Texas' constitution does not allow for statewide voter initiatives such as the one that made Prop 215 (California's Medical Marijuana Law), possible. Over 20 other states do not have voter initiatives.

The Keys to Change in Texas Are:

#1 - VOTE for who is most likely to support a positive change in marijuana law. This means doing your homework about each candidate to see how they stand on other personal and social issues and how what their stances are. It is also an excellent idea to call their office (existing or campaign) and ask the question directly, "Do you support a change in marijuana law that will enable it to be regulated and available for adult/medical use", as an example.

#2 - CALL and WRITE your current legislators to inquire about their stance and address any concerns they have about ending cannabis prohibition. Let them know you are educated, interested and active. Call or write as often as you'd like but stay on topic and professional. Please do this even if the person you voted for did not get elected.

#3 – VISIT your current legislators. It may sound like a big step (and it is) but regular people do it all the time. It is how laws get changed!

#4 – Stay Involved – Stay tuned to Texas NORML's newsletter and follow bills on the Texas Legislature's website so that you can make sure to take part in any action alerts or hearings.

This document will guide you through writing your representative/senator, making a phone call to their offices, and visiting the capitol to meet with your lawmakers or their staff. The first step is finding out who they are and how to contact them!

Locate your Representative and Senator:

Visit This Website: <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/>

Enter your address and click the "Submit" button. Your US Senator and Representative for Texas are listed first, followed by your elected State Officials: State Senator, State Representative, and State Board of Education member. Click on your Texas State Representative's and/or Senator's name. This will take you to their respective House or Senate member page which lists their contact information, as well as background such as bills they have authored or supported.

Note Your Representative and Senator's Contact Info:

State House Rep: District: ____ **Name:** _____ / **Phone #** _____ / **Address:** _____

State Senator: District: ____ **Name:** _____ / **Phone #** _____ / **Address:** _____



Contact Your Representative and Senator

You can choose to connect with your elected officials in many ways. It is important that you reach out to the Representative and Senator from **your** District. You elect this person and they are interested to hear what you think as their constituent. Whether you choose to call, email, write or visit here are some simple guidelines to follow.

Etiquette Guidelines:

Basics:

1. Dress professionally as though you were going to church or an interview for an office job.
2. Arrive 5-10 minutes early.
3. Have your talking points and notes prepared, including handouts/resource for the office.
4. Consider and ask about some of the concerns your legislator may have regarding the specific type of marijuana legalization you are going to discuss. Have counter points to common misconceptions, in your "back pocket" in case they are brought forth. If you do not have the knowledge or resources to address your Legislators concern, please make note of their concern, do research on the subject and follow up. If you say you will follow up with info, you must do so!

Always

1. Be courteous and respectful without "gushing."
2. Clearly and simply state the purpose of your visit, call or email. If it's about a certain bill, identify it correctly.
3. Say who you are. Anonymous contact goes nowhere. Even in email, include your correct name, address, phone number and email address. If you don't include at least your name and address, you will not get a response.
4. Use specific examples, a personal story, and evidence to support your position.
5. Keep your letter short -- one page is best.
6. Represent yourself as an individual voter, not as a representative of NORML or any other organization. You want your message to count individually.
7. Use specific examples, a personal story, and evidence to support your position. Make sure to share your resources with them!
8. State what you want done or recommend a course of action.
9. Thank the member or their staff for taking the time to meet with you.

Never

1. Use vulgarity, profanity, or threats. The first two are just plain rude and the third one can get you a visit from the Secret Service. Simply stated, don't let your passion get in the way of making your point.
2. Fail to include your name and address, even in email letters.
3. Say that you will follow up with information and fail to do so. This shows a lack of reliability.
4. Demand a response.

Next is an example of a letter/email you can modify and send to your legislators on the topic of medical cannabis.



Your Name
Your Address Line 1
Your Address Line 2

Date

The Honorable Representative/Senator (full name)
Address Line 1
Address Line 2

Dear Representative/Senator (last name),

It is long past time that our state joined the 32 other states and the District of Columbia in protecting the sickest among us from arrest and prosecution for using medical marijuana when their doctor recommends it. These various laws are helping seriously ill individuals across our country by relieving the nausea associated with chemotherapy, thereby increasing appetite, and by easing the pain and burning associated with neuropathic pain (which is notoriously unresponsive to other treatment options). The Compassionate Use Program is currently very limited, and all patients deserve safe, inclusive access to treatment options.

This important medical freedom has bipartisan support with the TX GOP platform supports calling "upon the Texas Legislature to improve the 2015 Compassionate Use Act to allow doctors to determine the appropriate use of cannabis to recommend to certified patients."

In addition to working to treat illnesses and conditions that have proven difficult to relieve, medical marijuana laws appear to help wean patients off much more addictive, and potentially deadly, commonly prescribed drugs like Percocet or Oxycontin. In fact, according to the Journal of American Medical Association, states with medical marijuana laws have a 25 percent lower rate of annual opiate analgesic overdose deaths compared to states without medical marijuana. If we trust our physicians to prescribe drugs that can cause death if not taken properly, we should also trust them to recommend medical marijuana, a substance that has not once caused a lethal overdose.

68% Americans now live in a state with laws protecting patients who benefit from the medical use of marijuana. But, unfortunately, many people in our state still have to choose between medicine vital to their well-being and operating within the law. They deserve every opportunity to have a normal quality of life, and you can help provide it for them. Our state's most vulnerable citizens deserve a chance to improve their well-being without breaking state law. Simply put, if their doctors think it will help, the state should not get in the way of a patient's chance for a better life.

A huge percentage (90%+) of Americans from all walks of life support well-regulated medical marijuana programs, and I hope you do, too. As your constituent, I am asking you to be part of a workable solution for patients. It's past time we adopted our own law to protect patients who choose medical marijuana. Please support efforts to make the Compassionate Use Program more inclusive for patients with chronic or debilitating medical conditions.

Thank you for your time and public service.

Sincerely,
Your name
(Include email and phone number if desired)

