

## Question 3 opens a door to abuse

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Statewide ballot question No. 3 -- the medical use of marijuana -- poses an interesting dilemma for Massachusetts voters Nov. 6.

In theory, the acceptance of marijuana for medicinal purposes, particularly for cancer patients and those suffering effects from debilitating diseases, appears to have reached a popular threshold among Massachusetts citizens. Polls show more than 60 percent of registered voters are in favor of approving the initiative. They see it as harmless in a state that already has decriminalized marijuana statutes.

In the new legal environment, how could anyone not be in favor of medical marijuana for people in need of pain relief?

Well, the issue is more complex than it seems. The sad truth is that good people are being hollowed out by addictions, and families are suffering the tragic consequences.

Some young people have become addicted to opiates by raiding their parents' medicine cabinets. So, in deciding Question 3, voters must answer: Can the state properly regulate medical-marijuana usage among those patients who are licensed to obtain it? And will those patients, some of whom will be permitted to grow marijuana in their homes and backyards, be responsible enough to keep the pot secure so that others don't use it?

Under the proposed initiative, the state would establish as many as 35 marijuana regulation centers -- or pot shops -- where patients will be able to fill doctor-approved prescriptions. Where will they be sited? Do Fitchburg or Leominster want one? How about Lunenburg or Westminster?

In addition, who is going to go around checking in private yards whether a patient is growing a suitable amount of marijuana for his or her needs, or growing an excess amount for what could lead to a criminal enterprise?

There is already too much government regulation in place. Is Massachusetts now going to create a new army of backyard pot patrolers -- at taxpayers' expense -- to drive through neighborhoods and survey everyone's backyard? That's ridiculous. Yet we can see a new bureaucracy growing as rapidly as pot plants.

The Massachusetts Medical Society, the statewide association of 24,000 licensed physicians, opposes Question 3 because of the health risks posed by marijuana. The contents of marijuana smoke are more poisonous than tobacco smoke, the MMS notes, and its use has been associated with long-term impairment of mental capacity. The group wants more scientific study done to justify pot use for relieving pain.

In the wake of the Jamaica Plain state-police drug-lab scandal, where regulatory controls were lacking and drug evidence was altered, we can't see how the state would be able to properly monitor 35 pot shops in communities across Massachusetts. Like we said before, in theory, Question 3 sounds reasonable. In reality, it's another open door to abuse.