

# POT: House bill would protect some users from prosecution

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pills she must take.

She wants the bill, she said, "so that if I was caught with it, I wouldn't be arrested."

When she learned Thursday night about the House vote, she said, "I'm thrilled that enough people see what is going on."

Perrera has tried Marinol, a drug some say is an alternative to marijuana. She said it hasn't worked for her. "It can be harsh to digest and it's difficult to control and have a life."

"Marijuana has allowed me to eat and be more stable," she said. "The risks of marijuana are very few, especially compared to the other drugs I'm on."

She dreams of the day she can take a prescription for marijuana to a local pharmacy and come home with her modest supply. "I've been fighting for my life for a long time," she said. "For me, it is just another tool."

## The fight

Three Republican lawmakers led the floor fight to pass the bill, while the bill's sponsor, Rep. David Zuckerman, P-Burlington, worked the hall to recruit supporters.

Rep. Thomas Little, R-Shelburne, helped win approval of the bill with an amendment that made it clear that patients couldn't smoke marijuana at work, couldn't carry bags of the dried weed into schools but could be prosecuted for driving while

under the influence of marijuana.

"I hope this provides a little more comfort that this is not a loosely constructed bill," Little said. "The purpose of this is very narrow."

Critics argued that the House Judiciary Committee hadn't taken any testimony about whether marijuana actually helped people.

Rep. Peg Flory, R-Pittsford, said the committee wanted that decision made by the doctor and patient. The sole goal of the bill, Flory said, was to make sure that a person who used marijuana with a doctor's approval wouldn't be

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**Katherine Perrera,**

uses marijuana to ease effects of HIV  
contracted through a transfusion

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prosecuted under state law.

Opponents tried to send the bill to the Health and Welfare Committee so the medical questions could be answered — knowing that the committee chairman had no intention of considering the measure. The move failed by a vote of 118-25.

Rep. Duncan Kilmartin, R-Newport, painted one scenario after another to illustrate all the weaknesses he saw in the law. He suggested young children with cancer would be able to smoke marijuana, that schools might be forced to allow its use by students, that businesses would

have to pay for an employee's marijuana growing room, pots and fertilizer.

Little said his amendment eliminated most of the problems Kilmartin had identified. It banned the use of medical marijuana in schools and other public places. It specified that employers had no responsibility to pay for the supplies or equipment connected with marijuana use.

The bill still faces hurdles. The House must take another vote and then the bill would go to the Senate where its fate is uncertain.

Gov. Howard Dean, a medical doctor, opposes the bill

and could veto it. He said Thursday that marijuana should be approved by the Federal Drug Administration if it is to be used as a medicine. He said people resort to unproved remedies when serious illness strikes, like taking zinc to cure cancer, but the government should approve such uses.

Eight states — Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington — permit patients to use marijuana for medical purposes.

Contact Nancy Remsen at 229-9141 or [nremsen@bfp.burlingtonfree-press.com](mailto:nremsen@bfp.burlingtonfree-press.com)

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