



King County



May 17, 2011

The Honorable Lisa Brown
Senate Majority Leader
PO Box 40403
Olympia, WA 98504-0403

The Honorable Mike Hewitt
Senate Republican Leader
PO Box 40416
Olympia, WA 98504-0416

The Honorable Frank Chopp
Speaker of the House
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

The Honorable Richard DeBolt
House Minority Leader
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Senate Majority Leader Brown, House Speaker Chopp, Senate Republican Leader Hewitt, and House Minority Leader DeBolt:

We write to respectfully urge you to enact legislation during the special session that will help bring clarity to Washington's medical marijuana laws. We understand the challenges you face during this special session as you work to develop a budget for the 2011-13 biennium. Unfortunately, the partial veto last month of E2SSB 5073 made an already difficult situation for local governments even more unclear as we attempt to regulate marijuana in a reasonable and safe manner.

The partial veto leaves local governments with no clear path forward as we struggle to balance three priorities: public safety; the need of qualified patients to have safe access to medical marijuana; and law enforcement's need for clarity. In particular, we have few good options for how to handle the medical marijuana dispensaries that have opened in our local jurisdictions. In the absence of new legislation, we at the local level will have to choose between closing down dispensaries and prosecuting the owners and workers, or allowing them to continue to multiply in an unclear regulatory environment.

Instead, we prefer to have clear authority to fully regulate patient cooperatives designed to dispense medical marijuana. We need a new law stating that non-profit patient cooperatives are not illegal and giving us regulatory authority at the local level. The new law would allow local authorities to limit cooperatives to appropriate locations, and require adequate security precautions. It would also allow us to close dispensaries that do not comply with the regulations we would be able to adopt and enforce.

Without a legal framework that allows for a viable, safe, well-regulated patient cooperative system, we are concerned collective gardens will proliferate. Under the new legislation as

it stands, collective gardens will become the primary legal option for qualified patients to acquire their medication. A proliferation of these 45-plant collective gardens in neighborhoods across King County—in basements, garages and backyards—will present us with many public safety challenges.

Although not perfect, the new bipartisan legislation, SB 5955, provides the kind of clarity we at the local level need, and that is why we urge you to enact it during the special session. Thank you very much for the time and consideration you are devoting to this difficult issue.

Respectfully,



Dow Constantine
King County Executive



Michael Patrick McGinn
Mayor of Seattle



Daniel T. Satterberg
King County Prosecuting Attorney



Peter S. Holmes
Seattle City Attorney