

Branstad rapped for comments about getting cannabis oil from Illinois

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Joe Bolkcom

The main sponsor of last year's legislation that decriminalized possession of cannabis oil for treatment of chronic epilepsy says Governor Branstad offered "false hope" last week when Branstad suggested Iowa patients might be able to get the product in Illinois.

Senator Joe Bolkcom, a Democrat from Iowa City, says he spoke with a key Illinois legislator involved in drafting that state's law. "You have to be a resident of Illinois and you're not allowed once you're certified as a patient in Illinois to take your medicine out of the state," Bolkcom says. "So it would require that Illinois change their law and allow that to happen and he believed the chances of that are absolutely zero."

Parents of children who suffer from chronic epilepsy say the Iowa law which decriminalized possession of cannabis oil as a treatment for their children is meaningless because they can't get it here and they can't go to another state to get it and bring it back. Governor Branstad [last week said](#) there might be "the possibility of working with a neighboring state" where cannabis oil is going to be produced and distributed. He noted a firm in the Quad Cities intends to submit a bid to the state of Illinois, seeking to be a distributor of the product.

"Obviously the Quad Cities (is) right across the river from Iowa...maybe that's a possibility of something we could do," Branstad said. "But that's all speculation."

The Illinois lawmaker who sponsored that state's medical marijuana law told the Associated Press last week that Branstad was talking "total nonsense" and Senator Bolkcom says the governor's statement is "astonishing".

"We need people to engage in a thoughtful discussion about that and not simply throw out really uninformed, irresponsible ideas that provide hope to people where none exist," Bolkcom says. "The governor and the people that work for the governor need to do more homework on this issue so that when they make statements, they have some basis in fact."

Bolkcom says sometime in the next week a bill that would set up a system in Iowa for growing marijuana and producing the non-intoxicating cannabis oil for dispensing to epileptics here will be introduced in the Iowa Senate.

"It's ironic that Senator Bolkcom is criticizing Governor Branstad for exploring opportunities to improve and fix the law that Senator Bolkcom authored," Branstad spokesman Jimmy Centers said in a written statement. "Governor Branstad empathizes with the families who are exploring treatment options for their loved ones and will continue having discussions with other states' leaders to explore solutions."

The State of Minnesota is currently reviewing bids and will designate eight providers of medical marijuana for residents in Minnesota as treatment for a number of conditions, including epilepsy as well as glaucoma, Crohn's Disease and chronic pain associated with a terminal illness. According to the latest timetable, eligible patients in Minnesota will be able to buy medical marijuana starting this July.

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