

# The Register's Editorial: Iowa should fix its cannabis oil problem, not Illinois

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(Photo: Brennan Linsley/AP file photo)

Last May, Gov. Terry Branstad stood in the rotunda of the Iowa Capitol and, with great fanfare, signed a bill allowing parents to purchase cannabis oil extract to lessen the effects of their children's epileptic seizures.

"This bill received tremendous support and truly shows the power of people talking to their legislators and to their governor about important issues to them, to their families and to their children," the governor said, acknowledging the presence of several families with children in wheelchairs.

The bill, which took effect last July 1, has decriminalized possession of the marijuana extract for medical purposes, but state law still prohibits the manufacture and distribution of cannabis oil in Iowa. That means families here still face the medical, legal, financial and practical hurdles of traveling to other states to obtain the

drug.



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This is not a matter of mere inconvenience. Of the 23 states that have enacted laws permitting the use of medical marijuana, 20 states, including Minnesota, require patients to provide proof of in-state residency.

Oregon has announced that it will accept out-of-state applications, but that's a 3,000 round-trip for an Iowa family.

Last week, Branstad suggested that Iowa residents might eventually be able to buy the oil in Illinois, where dispensaries are being planned as a result of legislation approved there in 2013.

The Illinois law has created a pilot program for the production and distribution of medical marijuana through 2017. The Illinois cultivation centers will be licensed and located at least 2,500 feet from child-care centers and schools. There will be no more than 60 licensed dispensaries in the state, and patients will be able to access no more than 2.5 ounces every 14 days.

The problem is that out-of-state buyers are not allowed under the Illinois law — and that's not likely to change, according to the legislation's primary sponsor, Rep. Lou Lang, a Democrat from Skokie.

"Not plausible at all," Lang said last week. "The governor of Iowa is talking nonsense."

The upshot of all this is that Iowa is left with a medical marijuana bill that is of no value to families in need.

And the governor of Iowa is in the strange and uncomfortable position of asking the Illinois Legislature to correct a problem of Iowa's own making. In fact, Branstad says he wants to discuss the matter with Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner, a Republican, while the two are attending meetings in Washington, D.C.

Given the sunset provisions of the Illinois law, and the fact that Illinois lawmakers are highly unlikely to change their law anytime soon, Branstad should re-direct his lobbying efforts to members of his own party here in Iowa. With 23 states having legalized the medical use of marijuana or some of its ingredients, there's no reason Iowa can't enact legislation that is similar to that of Illinois and allows for the distribution — not just the possession — of cannabis oil here in Iowa.

That would be legislation deserving of a bill-signing ceremony in the Capitol rotunda.

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