



March 16, 2007

Honorable Mark Leno, Member
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 684 -- OPPOSE

Dear Assemblymember Leno:

The Riverside Sheriffs' Association which represents over 2,800 rank and file Deputy Sheriffs, Deputy Probation Officers, Deputy Correctional Officers, District Attorney Investigators, and Deputy Coroners -- the entire law enforcement team in Riverside County -- is opposed to AB 684.

As we stated in our letter last session on this matter, the cultivation of industrial hemp presents a very real problem for law enforcement since hemp is virtually indistinguishable from marijuana upon visual or aerial examination. Law enforcement is already taxed with the burden of tracking and taking down illegally grown plants in California, even to the point of finding hidden gardens of crops inside new tract homes. Law enforcement resources are already taxed and apparently will continue to be so as long as sophisticated criminal marijuana cultivation takes place in this state. It is a guessing game to tell hemp from marijuana, and officers cannot afford to make a wrong guess. Wrong guesses deplete the finite funds presently set aside in suppression programs, and introducing the growth of hemp as a legal crop allows illegal marijuana growers to mingle hemp and illegal marijuana to confound those on marijuana suppression teams.

This bill ignores many of the real safeguards that other nations cultivating industrial hemp consider important. In Canada, hemp growers must obtain an annual license from the Dominion of Canada, undergo a criminal background check, and indicate the GPS coordinates of the location of their hemp farm.

Changing the definition of what is marijuana and standardizing the psychoactive quality (THC percentage) of a crop is an ambitious move, but it still does not solve any of law

enforcement's problems. The leaves will still look very similar, the growing number of fields to be inspected, the possibility that lab samples could be switched, the illegal marijuana plants that can be mixed in with legalized hemp and disappear with no one the wiser if harvest checks are made at the end of the growth season only. This bill does not require that the time of inspection be secret information, and finally, from our law enforcement perspective, what agency will be responsible if this new approach goes wrong? Who will pay for more teams to monitor not just the present marijuana growth (smarting under the addition not only of outside Latin American presences but Asian inroads) and industrial hemp as well? Does an agricultural lab station really offer a safe control environment and the kind of protection needed?


Major difficulties remain to be overcome before industrial hemp is added to California's list of agricultural crops. This bill contains new loop holes for illegal growth that differ from last year's AB 1147, but indeed, this measure still permits cultivation of hemp by anyone (individuals find it an attractive plant), and planters could also hire employees with convictions for marijuana trafficking who cleverly could plant anywhere, including areas generally known to be sites for hemp and/or illegal marijuana cultivation.

This is legislation that, in its present form, continues to undermine present marijuana suppression programs. Thank you for your consideration of our very real concern.

Very truly yours,



Pat McNamara
President



Timothy H. B. Yaryan
Legislative Counsel and Advocate

cc: RSA