

Pot bill passes California Assembly, Senate may extinguish it

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

A drive to regulate California marijuana dispensaries won a key victory Thursday, raising the hopes of advocates who argue that state oversight is critical to staving off federal raids on California's medical cannabis industry.

The state Assembly voted 41-28 to pass a bill to create a California policing agency to license marijuana stores and oversee a state-sanctioned medical pot industry from growers to delivery drivers to marijuana testing labs.

Since October, raids on California medical marijuana outlets and threats of federal prosecution against operators and landlords have shuttered scores of dispensaries across the state, including nearly 100 in Sacramento County.

Assembly Bill 2312 by Assemblyman Tom Ammiano, D-San Francisco, faces a difficult road to passage through the Senate and desk of Gov. Jerry Brown. The bill, which would create a Bureau of Medical Marijuana Enforcement in the state Department of Consumer Affairs, drew no formal law enforcement support.

The legislation has been blasted by critics as short on specifics as to how California can govern hundreds of dispensaries and thousands of workers in a state medical pot trade once valued at \$1.5 billion or more.

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