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HEALTH

Tensions grow between medical marijuana board and Iowa's only manufacturer over THC caps



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Iowa's state oversight board swatted down a pitch Monday to add another product type to Iowa's medical marijuana program — then berated what they view as one company's attempts to evade strict guidelines for cannabis use.

"If they want a recreational program, obtain one through the Legislature. Do not corrupt the medical board in your attempts to do so, which is what Bud & Mary's is

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on the board's characterizations, saying it was simply asking the advisory board to approve a more affordable option for Iowans who need the program to alleviate their health conditions.

"I was a little taken aback by the comments that we were somehow corrupting the board," said Lucas Nelson, group president of Bud & Mary's. "I didn't understand where that sentiment came from, and it seemed over the top for what the question at hand actually was."

Exclusive: Iowa's medical marijuana program is growing as THC waivers soar. Is it leading to abuse?

On Monday, the state board rejected a petition from Bud and Mary's to add "vaporizable flower" as an approved product under the state's medical marijuana program. It's the second time the board has rejected such a petition from the company.

Iowa is one of the few medical marijuana programs nationwide that does not allow for vaporized flower, though it does allow for the sale of vape cartridges. The product is dried and inhaled through a vaporizer.

Nelson said the company resubmitted the petition at the encouragement of state officials to align Iowa's program with more than two dozen other state medical marijuana programs nationwide.

Not only is this product a safe and effective form for consuming cannabis, but also it offers a cost savings to patients when compared to other cannabis forms, he said.

"We hear daily from people ... 'what can be done about the cost?' because it is simply more expensive in this state than it is in other places," Nelson said.

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~~vaporized flower products. The board said as a consumable product it can have serious~~
potential for long-term harm, particularly on young Iowans.

Approving that type of product would be "a substantial shift in how Iowa's program operates," the board stated in a report this week. Iowa's program is intended to be tightly controlled, and the petition goes against the program's effort to be "limited in scope and as medically defensible as possible."

"I think that the medical board is being utilized to try to kind of create an avenue towards more legalization," said Dr. Andrea Weber, a board member, during Monday's meeting. "I just encourage the companies, if that's what they think is important, to try to go more towards the Legislature and take their cases to them and not necessarily try to utilize this process or this (medical) program to do that right now."

Bud and Mary's does have a proposal before the Iowa Legislature, asking lawmakers to approve a flower form for use in this program.

"It is so important to do for the people that we're trying to serve, and we're going to take any route possible that may be available," he said.

But this rejection comes amidst a growing disagreement between the state oversight board and Bud and Mary's over the company's marketing and outreach efforts. Some board members said Monday they believed Bud and Mary's latest implied that the company was seeking to further exploit loopholes in the programs to increase use of certain products.

Earlier this month, the board denounced Bud and Mary's advertising on its website, which claimed that Iowans can get full THC products in Iowa legally. Officials with the company company's say it's making the distinction that Iowa has removed its 3% cap on THC levels in individual cannabis products, instead allowing patients to purchase up to 4.5 grams of THC every 90 days.

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connected to those marketing efforts.

Board members said this week they had "serious reservations with allowing this form in light of these marketing concerns and the intention to normalize cannabis."

The board asked the state to engage in "good-faith discussions" with Bud & Mary's over those concerns. Nelson said those conversations have not happened.

Nelson said Bud and Mary's will continue to advocate for more expansions to Iowa's medical marijuana program.

"This is the way we have to pursue changes to the program, and now that there isn't a route through the board, we'll continue pursuing it through the Legislature," he said. "We're going to continue pursuing it, because it's that important.

"It needs to get done, it needs to happen and Iowans will be better for it once we do."

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