

CHEBOYGAN DAILY TRIBUNE

Medical marijuana a concern for prosecutor's office

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CHEBOYGAN COUNTY- Cheboygan County Prosecutor Daryl Vizina recently spoke to the Cheboygan County Board of Commissioners on some of the issues for law enforcement and municipalities surrounding medical marijuana and grow operations.

Both Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont and Vizina have been contacted by at least one township inquiring about marijuana dispensaries in their respective communities.

“I contacted that township and offered my opinion with regard to things they should take into consideration,” said Vizina.

It is both Clarmont and Vizina’s opinion that the dispensaries and grow operations in any township in the county are not necessarily a great idea.

Vizina outlined his concerns in a memo to the commissioners that he presented Tuesday morning. This included his belief that since the Medical Marijuana Act became law, there is a vast majority of patients that are not necessarily using marijuana for legitimate medical conditions.

There have been ads in the newspaper for doctors from downstate who advertise for people to come to their motel rooms and get them their medical marijuana cards on a Saturday or Sunday.

Vizina said that’s about all it takes, but he doesn’t believe there are a lot of local physicians who are issuing the cards to their patients.

“Of course, there are a number of them, or a lot of people who use it for legitimate medical reasons,” said Vizina. “But I think that, from what I have seen, a lot of them are just people who want to use marijuana recreationally, get this certification from a doctor, get their card and then are using for recreational purposes.”

One of the concerns around the dispensaries and grow operations is the number of people from the region who come into the area to purchase or use the drug. This could pose concerns for law enforcement if it is done more in a recreational instead of a medical manner.

A concern regarding the laws, for Vizina, is that they are very ambiguous and difficult to understand. Otsego County has had a lot of trouble regarding the dispensaries, including people picketing in the streets and an increased number of raids from the Straits Area Narcotics Enforcement team when a dispensary is found to not be in compliance with the law.

The ambiguity in the laws makes it hard for law enforcement and prosecutors to know how to handle situations involving the drug, as well as confusion for those who are manufacturing the product.

“One other thing I want to point out, I guess, is I think there’s a public safety risk involved,” said Vizina.

There has been an elevated level of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol, the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis) in the drugs that have been seized by police over what was seized 10-15 years ago, by more than 10 percent concentration.

Another thing that should be considered by a township or a community is the fact that it is not as big of a revenue stream as it is made out to be. There is only a 3 percent tax on the product, and of that tax charged on it, 25 percent goes to the municipality where the facility is located, the county gets 30 percent, the sheriff’s department gets 5 percent, the state gets 30 percent, the Michigan State Police get 5 percent and the other 5 percent is for law enforcement training.

“So this isn’t some big, financial windfall to have one of these opened up in the county, in the city, in the township,” said Vizina.

The products sold at the dispensaries is another concern. Vizina’s biggest concern are products like marijuana-infused gummy bears, candy bars, soda and other food. They are made to look very similar to non-drug products, and there have been many cases where children have gotten a hold of the drug-infused products and needed to be admitted to the hospital for drug overdoses.

The concern really becomes, for the money the county or the other municipalities get for having the facility, how many kids are going to be exposed to the products.

“It’s almost like they’re marketing toward children in a lot of cases,” said Vizina.

Vizina said he doesn’t think having something like this in the townships is just a slam dunk and something the municipalities should all jump on board with. Many of the concerns outweigh the benefits.



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