

# Residents discuss response to medical marijuana law

**By MIKE DEHAN SPECIAL TO THE REPORTER**  
 Dorchester residents concerned about the implementation and enforcement of the state's new medical marijuana law met with legal and law enforcement experts on Wednesday for an information session on how local communities may be affected by the establishment of the new industry.

Organized by the Boston Alliance for Community Health, the sparsely attended session at the Dorchester House in Fields Corner featured speakers from the Boston Police Department, anti-tobacco groups and the Massachusetts Prevention Alliance, a group dedicated to the prevention of and recovery from substance abuse.

The information session was not designed to include information about how patients interested in obtaining medical marijuana could do so under the new law and instead focussed on how the community could respond to the new industry.

BACH director David Aronstein said issues of regulation and community impact were "vague or unaddressed in the actual language that was passed" in November.

Cheryl Sbarra, senior staff attorney for the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards' tobacco and chronic disease prevention program, laid out her legal concerns with the law. Sbarra pointed out what she called limitations in the law, specifically with definitions of who is legally authorized to provide medical consent for marijuana use, how that consent is given and the role of dispensary employees and personal caregivers.

A major concern of Sbarra's was the definition of the 60-day supply authorized under the law. Since that amount will be determined by DPH regulations and not statute, Sbarra said charges of abuse or fraud stemming from the amount a person possesses could be rebuttable in court.

Boston Police Drug Control Unit Commander Lt. Det. Robert Mermer said his unit will be at the forefront of enforcing the medical marijuana law. "The folks that are going to be dealing with this on a regular basis are uniformed police," Mermer said. BPD is working on an informational pamphlet that will help local police understand the new law and regula-

tions, he added. Mermer said the police will focus on criminals who try to manipulate the law or prey on those using zoning were presented by the Massachusetts Municipal Association's D.J. Wilson, who explained how other cities and towns have approached the issue.

Wilson said several communities have voted to ban dispensaries from opening in their jurisdiction, but that the Attorney General must approve those bylaws as constitutional before they can become effective. Strategies to control medical marijuana dispensaries include the use of zoning restrictions

the 10-zone model was driven by Dorchester's original zone being too big and students having a minimum of 17 schools available. Splitting the Dorchester zone in half allows for more localized predictability about which schools a student might potentially attend, he said. Under the 11-zone model, the chance of students attending the same school as their peers from their neighborhood increases 37 percent, compared to 24 percent under the

regulation scheme to avoid conflicting rules. Tactics for how the community could regulate the trade through a network of state-regulated dispensary centers last year on election day, with 63 percent of voters approving the measure statewide. In Boston, 69 percent of voters favored medical marijuana.

The new statute provides for each county of the commonwealth to house no more than five privately operated marijuana dispensaries, with no more than 35 locations in the entire state. The medical marijuana trade will be regulated by the state Department of

Public Health, which is in the process of determining the specific rules the industry will operate under. DPH plans to hold a series of open meetings to hear from citizens with input on regulations for medical marijuana in the coming weeks, with a Boston hearing scheduled for Thursday at Roxbury Community College's Reggie Lewis Center from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Legislative efforts to slow the implementation of the law or to force further restrictions on the medical marijuana trade have been championed by local lawmakers on both the state and city levels.

## City tweaks one school assignment model

School officials are tweaking one of three models that a mayoral advisory group is weighing as it seeks to overhaul the city's school assignment system. A 10-zone model will become an 11-zone model, with Dorchester getting split in two, one of the advisory group's members, Bill Walczak, said Tuesday night.

The other two models are called "home-based" and do not include zones, instead deploying an algorithm. Walczak said the decision to add another zone to

submit its recommendation to Superintendent Carol Johnson, who will take it to the mayorally appointed School Committee.

The advisory group has planned community meetings, including one that was scheduled for last night at Trotter Elementary School and another in East Boston next Thursday, Feb. 21. The panel will have a regular meeting next Tuesday at Suffolk University at 6 p.m.

— GINTAUTAS DUMCIUS