

Los Angeles Times - January 26, 2010

Los Angeles City Council Approves Medical Marijuana Ordinance That Will Shut Down Hundreds of Dispensaries

In a 9-3 vote, the Los Angeles City Council today gave its final approval to an ordinance that will shut down hundreds of medical marijuana dispensaries and impose strict rules on the location and operation of the dispensaries that are allowed.

The measure passed quickly, without debate.

The ordinance, which the council first began discussing more than 4 1/2 years ago, will cap the number of dispensaries at 70 but make an exception to allow all those that registered with the city in 2007 and have remained open. City officials believe that number is around 150.

Hundreds of dispensaries have opened in Los Angeles as the City Council debated its proposed ordinance and failed to enforce a moratorium on new dispensaries. City officials believe there are more than 500 that will be required to close under the ordinance, but some are already preparing to sue the city and collect signatures to force a referendum on the ordinance.

The ordinance also requires dispensaries to be at least 1,000 feet from other dispensaries and so-called sensitive uses, such as schools, parks and libraries. Among other restrictions, dispensaries will be required to close at 8 p.m. and will not be permitted to allow marijuana use at the stores.

The ordinance will not take effect until after Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa signs it and the City Council approves the fees that dispensaries will have to pay to cover the city's cost of monitoring. City officials are studying those costs and expect to propose the fees soon.

Once the ordinance is in place, the city attorney's office will send letters to affected landlords and dispensary operators telling them that they must close immediately. If the dispensaries remain open, the city attorney's office likely will take them to court.

-- John Hoeffel at City Hall