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Villaraigosa Urges Limit on Medical Marijuana Dispensaries

The Los Angeles mayor declines to say what the cap should be, but says it should be a level that can be adequately monitored by city officials and the Police Department.

By: John Hoeffel

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa urged the City Council on Wednesday to adopt a medical marijuana ordinance that would put a limit on the number of dispensaries.

"We have a right as a city to cap the number," he said, saying that a cap was "without question" needed to reduce the number to a level that the Police Department and city officials can adequately monitor. "Communities have a right to protect the character of those communities and the security of those neighborhoods."

The mayor declined to say what he thought the cap should be. "I can tell you that the current number of 800, or whatever, 900, is way beyond what any city should be able to accept," he said.

The council, which debated its draft ordinance Tuesday, instructed city officials to study a citywide cap between 70 and 200 dispensaries, and separate caps, set by population, for each of the city's 35 community plan areas or 21 police divisions. A number of cities have caps, but most of them are much smaller than Los Angeles. Oakland, the largest city to impose a cap, allows four.

Villaraigosa, who has to approve the ordinance, said the council needs to write one that does not allow dispensaries to sell marijuana in a way that violates state law.

Council members decided Tuesday not to ban medical marijuana sales, disregarding the advice of the city attorney and the Los Angeles County district attorney, who believe the law makes any sales illegal.

Instead, the council adopted a provision that allows cash contributions for marijuana, which was a compromise that members believe will allow sales to continue and the city attorney's top aides said would not run counter to state law. Villaraigosa said he had not reviewed the provision.

Although there is debate about whether the law allows sales, the law is clear that dispensaries cannot make a profit. Villaraigosa said he believed many in the city were violating the requirement. "People are trying to drive a truck through loopholes, and when you have that number it makes it very difficult for us," he said.