

B.C. court makes medical marijuana more legal

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THE MARTLET

VICTORIA (CUP) – The quasi-legal status of Victoria's compassion clubs may have come a step closer to resolution last week after a B.C. Supreme Court ruling declared parts of Canada's current medicinal marijuana laws unconstitutional.

The law, which forbids any supplier from distributing medical marijuana to more than one patient, has forced the non-profit clubs into operating illegally, despite the consent of Victoria's police.

The judge has given Health Canada one year to review the laws and make it easier for purveyors of medicinal marijuana, both inside and outside the law, to keep patients supplied.

The verdict comes as a huge victory, especially for Mat Beren of the Vancouver Island Compassion Society. Beren was caught tending the VICS' grow-op in Sooke when police raided the facility in 2004 and confiscated 900 plants.

Although Beren was found guilty of growing and trafficking an illegal substance, the prosecution's demands for a stiff sentence were thrown out.

Instead, the judge completely discharged the conviction, meaning that there will be no penalty or criminal record because Beren had been growing the cannabis for the club.

This ruling brings into light the legal limbo in which many organizations such as VICS operate. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that marijuana, which is effective for easing the suffering of those with chronic conditions, is a constitutional medicine

and the government has a responsibility to provide it to those with a doctor's prescription.

Beren's defence made the case that the marijuana provided by the federal government, grown in a Manitoba mineshaft, was of poor quality and obtaining it meant jumping over "unnecessary bureaucratic delays or obstacles."

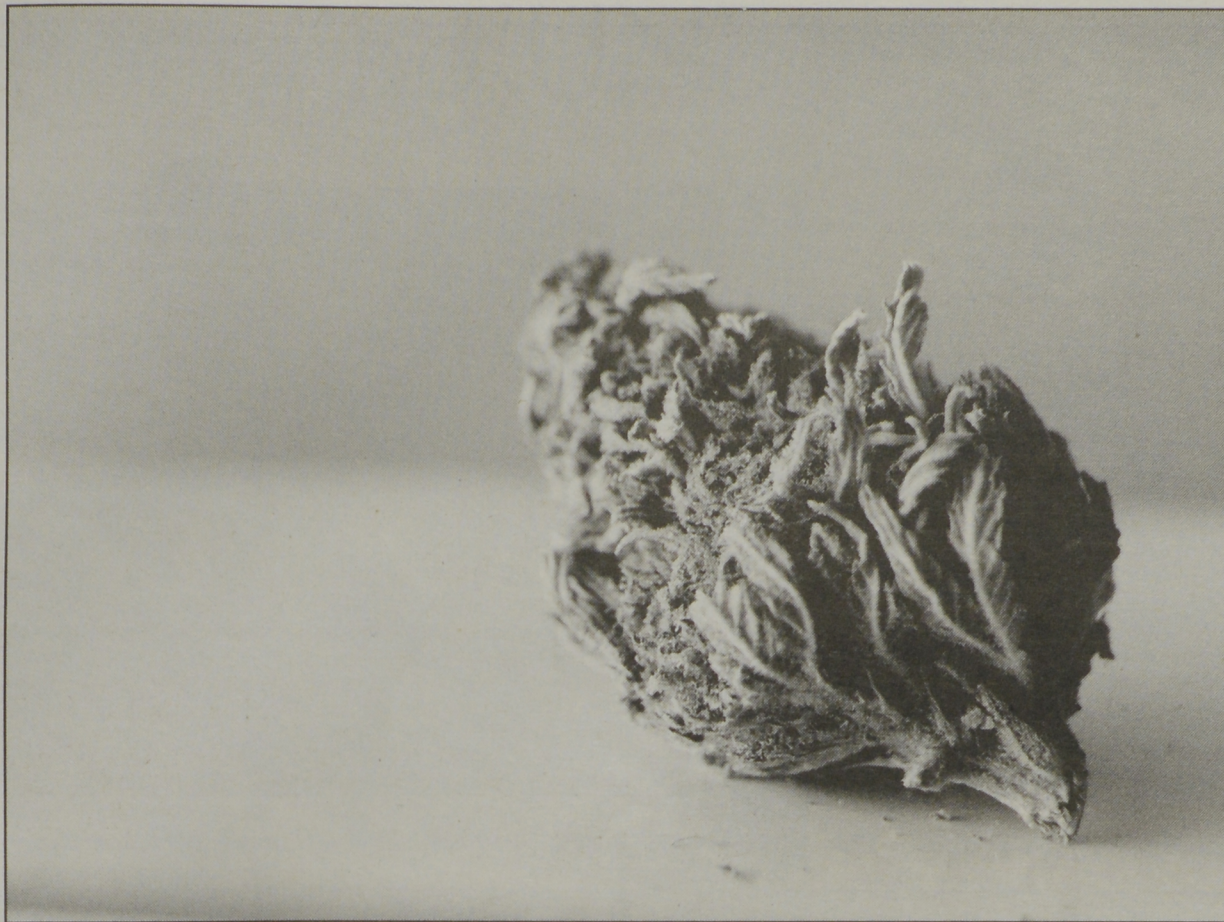
Philippe Lucas, the director of VICS, also points out that the federal application process can take weeks or months, time which can be ill-afforded by those who are in enough pain to warrant a medicinal marijuana prescription.

It was because of these regulatory hurdles and the inadequacy of the federal marijuana that the compassion clubs were able to spring into existence – VICS serves more than 850 doctor-referred patients on Vancouver Island. Justice Marvyn Koenigsberg ruled in Beren's case that while compassion clubs "enhanced other people's lives at minimal or no risk to society," they "did so outside any legal framework."

The onus to reform the legal framework lies not with the compassion clubs, which operate "openly, and with reasonable safeguards," but with Health Canada and the Canadian College of Physicians who failed to make medicinal marijuana sufficiently available for chronic sufferers, said Koenigsberg.

Other compassion associations, like the Cannabis Buyers Club, a corollary of UVic's own Hempology 101 Society, have greeted the likely review of the laws surrounding clubs with enthusiasm.

The Cannabis Buyers Club has undergone six police raids on their headquarters in downtown Victoria, and the operators have spent several nights in jail, with the charges overturned by



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courts each time.

Kristen Mann, Cannabis Buyers Club spokesperson, says she'll welcome what a review could mean for the club, but notes that the system still needs many changes.

"Although we have been accepted by the Victoria Police and the B.C. courts, on a federal level, we are still considered to be distributors of marijuana, which is illegal," Mann said.

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Five-vehicle collision could have been explosive

A five-vehicle collision at the Irving station at the corner of Prospect and Regent caused quite a scare last Thursday afternoon. Two vehicles, a black Volvo and a sport utility vehicle, were heading in opposite directions in the parking lot when they collided with each other. The SUV spun forward and smashed into a gasoline pump, knocking the pump over onto another vehicle that was fuelling up. The force of the crash continued to drive the SUV forward and it hit two parked cars in the southbound fuelling bay. There were no fires or explosions and the only injuries were minor ones suffered by a passenger in one of the parked vehicles.

Soldier's death hits close to home

One of three Canadian Soldiers killed last Tuesday in Afghanistan was from Oromocto. Cpl. Kenneth Chad O'Quinn moved to New Brunswick as a child. O'Quinn attended Oromocto High School and was involved in football and minor hockey. O'Quinn was killed in a roadside bomb attack outside Kandahar last Tuesday evening along with Warrant Officer Dennis Raymond Brown and Cpl. Dany Fortin.

Fredericton native dies in fall from St. FX window

Nicholas John Sheehan, an 18 year old student originally from Fredericton, fell out of a fourth floor window of St. FX's Lane Hall residence on Sunday night. He was killed by the fall.

RCMP do not suspect foul play, but RCMP spokesperson Sgt. Mark Gallagher told the CBC that police are investigating whether or not drugs or alcohol played a part in the first year student's death. Students and others around campus are being asked if they know anything more about details on the fall. Gallagher said family members will be asked for details as well. No other details were available as of Monday night's Brunswickan print deadline.

Maple Leaf recalls hot dogs

Maple Leaf Foods launched another recall on Feb. 25. This time it was for 450-gram packages of Shopsy's Deli Fresh All Beef Frankfurters and Maple Leaf Hot Dogs. The wieners were mistakenly shipped to stores in Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. They were supposed to be part of a shipment of 26,000 hot dog packages that were to be quarantined. The company says that the risk to the public is very low. They said that they have contacted all vendors of the hot dogs and that the products have been removed from store shelves. An outbreak of listeriosis that killed at least 20 people last summer was linked to one of Maple Leaf's Toronto plants, triggering the largest meat recall in Canadian history.

Boa constrictors now available at pet stores

Boa constrictors and other snakes that are up to three metres in length will soon be available at some local pet stores. The provincial government recently made changes to the regulations that restrict what animals can be brought into the province for sale. Pet stores pushed for the change because regulations were more restrictive than in other jurisdictions. Pet stores will also be allowed to sell other exotic pets, including lizards and some non-poisonous snakes.

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