

**\*\* For Immediate Release\*\***  
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## **Veterans Rally for HOMEGROW: Vol 2!**

*Louisiana Veterans for Medical Cannabis Hosts Veterans Rally on Opening Day of the Legislative Session Advocating for Patients' Home Cultivation Rights*

**BATON ROUGE, LA** — Louisiana veterans, medical marijuana (MMJ) patients, and community advocates are joining forces for the third annual Veterans Rally held at Veterans' Park on the grounds of the Louisiana State Capitol at 8:30 AM on March 11, 2024. The rally focuses on home cultivation rights for patients, also known as HOMEGROW.

## **MARIJUANA RE-SCHEDULING ON THE HORIZON**

According to a report by the National Association of State Legislatures (NASL), as of November 8, 2023, 38 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia allow the use of medical cannabis products (NASL, 2024). Additionally, 24 states, two territories and the District of Columbia have enacted measures to regulate cannabis for non-medical, adult, or recreational use (2024).

Nearly half of the state medical marijuana (MMJ) programs allow patients and their caregivers the right to cultivate anywhere between six - 12 plants per patient. Louisiana veterans and patient advocates hope to add Louisiana to that list.

## **A LOOK AT OTHER STATE MARKETS**

"It's not just Colorado and California," said Tony Landry, event founder and US Navy Veteran.

“Other conservative-leaning states like Missouri, Ohio, and Oklahoma allow HOMEGROW,” Landry added, “It will take Ohio dispensaries nine months to open, but the State of Ohio is helping their patients, letting them grow up to 12 plants as of December 2023!”

Landry founded the grassroots organization Louisiana Veterans for Medical Cannabis (LVMC) to help connect veterans, their families, and other medical cannabis patients to advocate for improved access to medical cannabis.

“This year patients believe we really have a chance. We are so grateful for Representative Edmond Jordan’s House Bill 707 which has a section dedicated to home cultivation, **up to 12 plants per household!**” exclaimed Landry.

“This would improve the lives of so many patients in Louisiana and we urge everyone to reach out to their representatives and tell them to support Rep. Jordan’s Bill HB 707,” added Landry.

## OHIO

Ohio Sales are projected to reach as high as \$2 billion in the first full year of sales before doubling to \$4 billion by year four, according to the 2023 MJBiz Factbook (Roberts, 2023). Ohio’s medical program has 37 licensed cultivators and 114 dispensaries serving 178,703 registered patients (Roberts, 2023). Ohio medical marijuana patients are allowed to cultivate up to 12 plants per household and the cannabis-community began hosting marijuana farmers’ markets in cities like Cleveland.

## MICHIGAN

Michigan marijuana sales reached \$3 billion in 2023; Michigan patients AND anyone over the age of 21 can currently cultivate up to 12 plants (MJBiz, 2024; Michigan Medical Marijuana Program, 2024).

## CONNECTICUT

In 2023, Connecticut sold \$273 million worth of marijuana—\$129 million of which was medical sales—collecting \$22 million in tax revenue for the state (Zymaris, 2024).

In 2023, Connecticut stopped charging for registrations for medical patients and caregivers (Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, 2023). Connecticut has 42,179 patients who can grow up to 12 plants per household (MPP, 2024; [connecticut.gov](https://connecticut.gov), 2024).

## MARYLAND

Since launching in July 2023, Maryland's recreational marijuana market ended 2023 with **\$331.8 million in sales**, according to data from the Maryland Cannabis Administration (2024). Maryland sold \$464.5 million of medical marijuana in 2023, averaging about \$38.7 million a month, bringing total cannabis sales to \$796.3 million for 2023 (MJ Biz, January 16, 2024).

According to the Marijuana Policy Project, Maryland has 162,401 registered patients and currently allows patients to grow up to (4) four plants (MPP, 2024; Maryland Cannabis Administration, 2024).

## NEW YORK

According to the New York Office of Cannabis Management (2024), nearly 6,200 licenses, permits, and registrations were issued or provisionally approved for the first year and the state had more than 121,900 patients registered with the Medical Cannabis Program.

New York allows for "auto registration" of MMJ patients, "making it easier for patients in New York to access medicinal cannabis;" New York is also on the books to have HOMEGROW rules drafted no later than July of 2024 (NASL, 2024; NY Office of Cannabis Management, 2024).

## KENTUCKY

In 2024, Kentucky HB 160 would put on the ballot an amendment to Kentucky's Constitution to allow adults to grow, possess, buy, and sell one ounce or less of cannabis"(Mudd, 2023). In 2022, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear issued Executive Order 798 allowing patients the ability to obtain up to eight (8) ounces of medical cannabis products from out-of-state dispensaries (Aulbach, Smith & Grapevine, 2024).

Allowing neighboring state reciprocity would be a gamechanger for Louisiana patients, who already travel to states like Arkansas and Mississippi to get products at prices sometimes 50% lower than Louisiana—sometimes even by the same brand!

## HOMEGROW DOES NOT DAMPER INDUSTRY PROFITS

"States allow patients the right to HOMEGROW because they know these little HOMEGROWS will not put the multi-billion dollar marijuana industry out of business," said Landry, noting the need to strike a balance between patient access and industry sustainability.

“People hear homegrow and they start pearl-clutching,” said Angela Owings Broussard, founder of the grassroots organization LAMMJ which hopes to increase access and affordability of medical marijuana while erasing it’s undeserved stigma.

“This is not the end of civilized society. It’s not the ‘Wild West,’” added Broussard, “It’s Vermont.”

## VERMONT

The first three months Vermont sold cannabis, state sales exceeded \$6.1 million (Vermont Department of Taxes, 2024). When the state started adult use at the end of 2022, the board licensed over 300 cultivators and more than 50 retail stores within its first year of operation (Kinzel, Jarecki & Trevellyan, 2023).

Vermont patients can currently grow up to 12 plants (NORML, 2023).

“Vermont is known for pancake syrup...Vermont is *not* hosting weekly LSU tailgate parties or a month of Mardi Gras parades. Louisiana has no business talking about anybody being wild,” said Broussard.

“HOMEGROW allows patients a way to afford and access our medication,” said Landry, adding organizations like NORML and the Marijuana Policy Project list home cultivation rights as a key component of any true, patient-centered MMJ program (NORML, 2024).

“With possible DEA rescheduling up in the air, most people think marijuana is about to be as medically available as Tylenol,” Broussard added.

## A USEFUL TOOL IN FIGHTING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) 252-page document, cannabis has a “currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States” with “little potential for abuse.” This was the first time health officials have officially recommended the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) place cannabis in Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA)” (Adlin, 2024).

It’s not just veterans that are choosing to medicate with marijuana. More than 30,000 healthcare professionals across 43 US jurisdictions are authorized to recommend medical marijuana to more than (6) six million registered patients for more than 15 medical conditions (Adlin, 2024).

A report from Kentucky's medical marijuana advisory committee determined that marijuana:

Can serve as an alternative to addictive opioids, that Kentuckians are leaving the state to seek medical cannabis treatment where it's legal, and that marijuana helps military veterans find relief from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Aulbach, Smith & Grapevine, 2024; Kentucky Executive Order 798, 2022).

## PRICE IS THE #1 BARRIER

For many patients, especially those in high-cost and no-competition markets like Louisiana's Medical Marijuana Program, price is the number one barrier preventing patients from receiving pain relief.

In a New York Department of Health press release, Senator George Amedore (R-New York) supports advocates' warnings:

I have been strongly advocating to remove barriers and allow the use of medical marijuana as an alternative to opioids because it will help patients, reduce the number of highly addictive opioids in circulation, and ultimately, it will save lives (2018).

Senator Amedore serves as Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse and as Co-Chair of the bipartisan Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction (<https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/george-amedore>).

New York Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard N. Gottfried's recent comments further support these findings:

With the ongoing opioid abuse crisis it is critical that practitioners and patients have access to as many alternatives to opioids as possible. Evidence from across the country shows that access to medical marijuana for pain treatment reduces the use of much more dangerous opioids (NY Department of Health, 2018).

Unfortunately, many Louisiana patients ration their MMJ, under-treating their pain and conditions. Some Louisiana patients never enroll or drop out of the program altogether because of the state's high prices, making cost the number one barrier for most Louisiana patients.

## LOUISIANA'S IS LAGGING BEHIND + LIMITING COMPETITION

Louisiana patients blame the states artificially inflated prices on limiting supply to two cultivators, one of which is owned by Louisiana legislators and their campaign donors (Karlin, 2022). The state is essentially preventing competition to ensure well-connected investors turn an astounding profit while patients are left footing the bill for millionaires and politicians.

Even compared to states that have only been open one year, Louisiana is lagging behind successful medical marijuana markets by all metrics. Louisiana began selling marijuana in 2019 yet five years later it still has only (2) two cultivators.

According to an exchange between Senator Patrick Connick (R-Dist. 8, Marrero) and Senator W. Jay Luneau (D-Dist. 29, Pineville), the state is “limiting competition” and has not expanded cultivation licenses or pharmacies because it wants to “guarantee a return on investment” for private businesses owned by legislators (LAMMJ, 2022). Exchange Link: [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/d5Cj9LQU\\_p4](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/d5Cj9LQU_p4)

Patients in the entire state of Louisiana have only 13 dispensaries. While a few were added, these are satellite locations—or as advocates call them “mini-monopolies.”

The satellite model ensures prices remain high for patients because if a dispensary owner drops prices at one location they will be undercutting their other satellite locations and thus undercutting their own business.

At least two of these satellite locations are now “managed” by the legislator-owned cultivation monopoly according to their website.

“All small businesses face challenges but opening a small business in the cannabis industry in Louisiana has been something else,” said Casey White who founded Pippi’s Purpose dispensary-style CBD and smoke shop in Abbeville nearly six years ago.

“We are bullied now more than ever. Nothing has changed. If you aren’t in the club, you have no voice. And it’s a difficult club to get in,” said White, adding that new laws appeared to target the legal hemp industry.

Many times patients supplement with legal hemp CBD tinctures and Delta-9 Hemp edibles, many times in the form of chewy, fruit gummies that contain about eight (8) mg of legal THC (the same medicine in medical marijuana).

CBD shops are the only legal competition for the legislator-owned monopoly and the lower-cost option relied on by many patients who supplement with hemp because they cannot afford the state medical marijuana program, its expensive doctors visits, and prescriptions gauged upwards of \$450 an ounce.

“The role of the government should be to assist small business to succeed. That helps everyone benefit. But in our industry, it seems Louisiana is determined to put us out of business. In many cases, they have already succeeded,” said White.

## Mississippi

While Louisiana stifles progress, Mississippi is encouraging small business. According to the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program: Mississippi already has 67 cultivators compared to Louisiana’s two; Mississippi also has 189 dispensaries compared to Louisiana’s 13—despite the fact that Mississippi’s entire program has been open barely one calendar year (<https://www.mmcp.ms.gov/>; (Harrison, 2024; Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program, 2024; MJBiz, 2024).

“Louisiana has had five years to fix this and it’s only gotten worse and more corrupt. They actively prevent competition, forcing Louisiana patients to pay some of the highest prices in the country. They are taking advantage of us and it needs to stop. We deserve the dignity to grow our medicine ourselves, like other patients do all around the country,” said Broussard.

## DANGERS OF MARKET FAILURE + CONTAMINATION

Despite having 67 cultivators, Mississippi patients got a scare in January when Mississippi experienced a statewide recall, placing a hold on 70% of their products due to the potential contamination from pesticides and the presence of mycotoxins,” the Mississippi Department of Health announced in a December 27, 2023 Alert (Harrison, 2024; Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program, 2024; MJBiz, 2024).

Louisiana patients have complained about the program not taking patient complaints seriously, not testing questionable products, and not reporting any findings on batches that several patients complained had what appeared to be mold inside their medication jars and broken seals.

Mold, mildew, pesticides, and mycotoxins can be dangerous to all patients but an Aspergillum contamination could be deadly to immune-compromised patients (Szyper-Kravitz, Lang, Manor & Lahav, 2001).



Contaminations, infestations, and even crop failures happen all the time to any type of agricultural industry. Patients in California, Colorado, and other states further west have dealt with similar product recalls due to mold, mildew, yeast, and dangerous pesticides (Casacchia, 2023, December 11; Guy, 2022; Mitchell, 2023).

## Missouri

Missouri had a large-scale recall in August of more than 60,000 infused products and countless liters of distillate that investors say may have triggered the recent sales declines (Casacchia, 2023, September 22).

Missouri began adult-use on February 3, 2023, utilizing growers already in place for the medical program. Missouri surpassed \$1.3 billion in adult-use cannabis sales its first year of operation, according to the state's Department of Health and Human Resources (Adlin, January 22, 2024; Lange, 2023).

Missouri's Department of Health and Senior Services reports that Missouri patients are allowed to grow six (6) flowering and six (6) vegetative plants, 12 per patient. The state of Missouri still managed to make an additional \$300 million in medical cannabis sales for 2023 (Lange, 2023).

Agriculture is unpredictable. Just like any agricultural product, Louisiana could be one pest infestation or mold growth away from complete program collapse because Louisiana has only two growers hoping to supply an entire state.

Broussard added: "Putting all our eggs in just two (2) baskets is asking for trouble."

According to Executive Director of the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy, Louisiana patient numbers at the end of 2023 were 50,422 (Fontenot, 2024).

"50,000 patients deserve to know that we have access to a consistent, safe, and affordable supply of our medication," said Landry.

"Addressing these drawbacks requires a balanced approach that considers sustainability, environmental stewardship, community engagement, and regulatory compliance in the cannabis industry," added Landry.

## GARDENING TAKES TIME + FOCUS + COMMUNITY

"HOMEGROW can be a nine month process: It takes months for seeds to germinate and grow into plants. It takes a few more months for plants to grow into flowers. Weeks for flowers to cure properly into quality medicine,"



described Ryan Bales, a US Army combat veteran who advocated at the Louisiana Medical Marijuana Task Force Meeting at the Capitol for employment protections for service members and first responders.

“And, that’s not even accounting for the equipment costs and the learning curve.”

“Many of us just want the opportunity to help a fellow service member or a patient too sick to grow it for themselves,” said Bales, who hopes to serve as a caregiver for family members and other veterans, “Many patients will still buy most of their marijuana from the dispensaries.”

Many hopeful caregivers are also current caretakers. Louisiana Social Media Influencer Tasha Buras, or @theCurlyCreole as she is known to her more than 350,000 followers on TikTok and Instagram, is a medical marijuana patient and serves as a caregiver to her grandfather.

“Paw Paw served this nation. He was in the marines. Like many veterans, he is older and has a bunch of health problems that medical marijuana could help if it was not for the stigma,” said Buras, “Medical marijuana is stigmatized so bad that many veterans just stay on pharmaceuticals because they don’t want to deal with it.”

“That goes against everything my family has been doing for hundreds of years” added Buras, describing her childhood memories of helping her grandparents grow vegetables and herbs in the family garden.

“When we were sick growing up, we used herbs you can grow in your backyard to treat the symptoms,” recalled Buras, “Our garden was our medicine cabinet.”

“Rosemary helps keep the bugs away. Lavender oil calms skin irritation,” said Buras, adding that Okra was one of her grandmother’s go-to medicines for digestion issues and other gastrointestinal problems.

“Peppermint grown in my maw maw’s garden, we would crush it up and make a tea with it,” recalled Buras. “It soothes an upset stomach. My kids use peppermint tea today if their stomach hurts.”

“My grandmother was Native American, indigenous. My family is Creole, too,” said Buras, “Many families in Louisiana grew up like me and they prefer to use herbs and natural medicines for pain instead of relying on opioids,” added Buras.

Landry added, “People want alternatives to opioids. The problem is the price. Not many people I know can afford the Louisiana dispensary marijuana. Some strains were listing for \$400 - \$500 an OUNCE. A vape cart in Louisiana is about \$100 for just a half gram when other states are selling a full gram for \$30-\$40.”

“We are really getting upcharged. Who can afford that?” asked Landry, “People are just suffering in pain really for no reason.”

“Then people go looking for alternatives on the Illicit Market and that’s what we want to avoid,” said Casey Leleux.

## HARM REDUCTION SAVES LIVES

In April 2022, Casey Leleux lost her daughter Lyric “Bebop” Verrett to the Fentanyl Epidemic. Lyric took a pill she thought was a Xanax, but it was poisoned with Fentanyl.

The East Baton Rouge Narcotics Division discovered enough fentanyl in one year to potentially kill 150,000 people (Brown, 2023). Hoping to educate people how dangerous that number is, Leleux started Lyric’s Legacy which recently expanded to three chapters now operating in Lafayette, New Orleans, and Monroe.

In 2021, Louisiana recorded nearly 2,463 overdose deaths, nearly double the national average; and, according to the CDC, fentanyl is involved in nearly 95% of all overdose deaths (Masson, 2023).

“Bringing awareness to this public health crisis gave me something to focus on after losing Lyric,” Leleux said. “Helping save lives helps me deal with our family’s loss,” Leleux said describing the unimaginable grief she felt after losing her daughter Lyric. She now orchestrates harm-reduction events around the state, passing out as much Narcan as possible.

“Narcan stops an opioid overdose from taking someone’s life,” added Leleux.

Lyric’s Legacy hopes to raise awareness about the growing drug epidemic facing our state and nation; the organization also offers FREE rides to rehab, hands out FREE fentanyl test kits, and provides Narcan for FREE to anyone who wants it.

“In America, a 747-jet full of people each day is lost to opioids and fentanyl,” said Leleux, “The problem is getting worse in many places, not better.”

“Everyone is touched by this tragedy. Everyone has lost someone. We just want to do what we can to save lives,” said Leleux.

Leleux’s platform of harm reduction strategies align with promising new research indicating that cannabis may potentially “improve the quality of life of patients and overall public health by providing a substitute to narcotics and opioids” (Lucas, Boyd, Milloy, & Walsh, 2021).

“Homegrow rights provide therapeutic benefits, combat the opioid epidemic, and reduce the societal costs associated with opioid abuse, addiction, and overdose,” said Landry.

“If it works, it should be available. Simple as that. Price should not be a barrier to pain relief, especially with something as easily grown as marijuana,” said Landry.

“It would save us money every month if we could grow it ourselves. We can then medicate like we need to instead of rationing our medication or going without and living in constant, unnecessary pain,” added Broussard.

Patients undergoing chemotherapy, living with chronic pain, or struggling with PTSD require high amounts of MMJ. Currently, just one high-dose Louisiana patient might pay anywhere from \$1,000 - \$3,000 a month for one patient and \$3,000 - \$6,000 every month for a two-patient household. Neither of these figures are affordable for most citizens living in Louisiana, a state plagued by severe poverty

## LOUISIANA-LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL

According to the US Census Bureau, America’s city with the highest percentage of households living below the poverty level is Monroe, Louisiana—making it one of the poorest cities in the U.S. In Monroe, 41.90% of households have an income of less than \$35,000 (DePietro, 2023).

According to a recent report by The Madison Trust (2023), several other Louisiana cities have a high percentage of their population living in poverty, including Shreveport-Bossier City (35%), Lafayette (36%), and Hammond (33%).

“If someone is making less than \$35,000 a year, how would they be able to afford a \$12,000 annual medical cannabis bill, and that’s on the low end in our program. What if there are two patients trying to survive off that?” asked Broussard.

“What’s left for food? Housing? Insurance? It’s unacceptable that patients on a fixed income are being used to pay off legislators’ private businesses” added Landry, whose group also seeks to connect veterans and farmers through vibrant, regional cannabis farmers’ markets modeled after states like Ohio and California.

## VETERANS AT RISK

“Veterans, especially women veterans with children, face a series of challenges once they are done with their military service and are beginning the transition to a civilian life,” said US Air Force Veteran Brandi Pett.

“As a single mama, I know what many women vets face when they come home. Women veterans and their children are at an increased risk of becoming homeless,” added Pett. “We need to make that transition easier for them.”

In 2011, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported, more than 60% of programs that serve homeless women veterans do not house children; “most programs that did house children had restrictions on the ages or numbers of children” (The Last Salute, 2024).

“Veterans come back with injuries. Either mental or physical or both. Veterans struggle to afford necessities like housing; they should not have to worry about things like marijuana markets, especially if they can save money simply by growing a few plants for themselves like so many other states allow,” said former US Air Force Staff Sergeant Pett.

While in the Air Force, Pett served as an aerospace medical technician and immunology technician. She also was a medic, EMT Instructor, CPR Instructor, and CPR Instructor Trainer before arterial blood clots in her heart, both arms, and both legs required multiple surgeries.

These traumatic medical experiences left their mark. As a result, Pett works to erase the stigma associated with scars, including a segment on her TikTok that garnered more than five (5) million views where she “laces up” her legs similar to a corset.

“I think scars are beautiful. I hope to help people with scars or different limbs feel confident and beautiful. Because they are,” said Pett.

Pett raises money and networks with independent tattoo artists to donate tattoos for veterans through her podcast called “Yes, I Am The Veteran”

(available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#)), which discusses issues in the veteran community with various non-profits and professionals.

“Tattoos are a way to reclaim our bodies and tell our stories. It’s living art,” said Pett. “We have been fortunate to work with such talented tattoo artists. It’s been an inspiring project.”

Pett’s recovery is inspiring. The blood clots triggered lifelong medical challenges: A triple limb salvage, necrotizing fasciitis, and compartment syndrome. Despite years of physical therapy and ongoing chronic and debilitating medical conditions, Pett remained relentless in not letting her injuries define her.

“I was told I would never walk again,” Pett recalled in an interview (Russell, 2020).

Refusing to accept that diagnosis, Pett not only walked again but she waltzed across the stage of the Ms. Veteran America contest, snagging official status as “Hot Mama of the Year” for 2020.

Pett’s father was a drill sergeant in the Army and her family tree stretches across several branches of the military. Now, Pett spends her “free time” raising money and awareness for various veteran-related charities and grassroots groups.

## 2STEP

Pett volunteers with Tracy Anne LaPorte’s group to help pass the [2Step Act](#) in Texas (<https://2stepact.com/>), named after LaPorte’s son Adam “2Step” Huckstep who lost his life to an unlicensed rental car driver. Huckstep was an active duty sergeant in the US Army, serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and preparing for deployment to Afghanistan when he was killed. LaPorte now devotes her life to preventing this from happening to other veterans and doing what she can to help other veterans and the Gold Star family community.

## GUITARS FOR VETS

Pett also helps promote [Guitars 4 Vets](#), a group that provides veterans with guitars and lessons, veterans teaching veterans guitar.

Daniel Talley with the Louisiana Chapter of Guitars4Vets will be performing at the rally, sponsoring the music for the day.

Guitars for Vets is a nation-wide, non-profit organization that aims to help veterans cope with PTSD through the love of music. Guitars for Vets helps veterans join a community where they learn to play the guitar and find solace in the songs they love as well as the songs they have yet to write.

Talley who is a 10-year veteran in the United States Marine Corps and retired deputy also works with [Patriot Support](#), another organization that helps active military, veterans, and first responders find resources for behavioral health.

## RESCUE RESIDENCE

Pett recently published “The Pinup Noir Calendar,” and 25% of each calendar sold goes to [@rescue\\_residence](#) to create safe, mobile housing for homeless veterans utilizing retired ambulances.

## YES I AM THE VETERAN PODCAST

“If veterans are dealing with chronic pain or PTSD from their military service, they should have the choice to medicate with whatever helps them the best, especially if it helps veterans get off dangerous and addictive prescriptions like opioids,” said Pett, who also writes about alternative medical treatments in her spare time and hosted the rally speakers on her podcast on February 29, 2024 at 2:00 PM.

“Home cultivation increases access to medical marijuana,” said Bill Richard, the current chief operating officer and co-founder of Blue Basin Canna. Richard also founded the Counseling Center of Acadiana, Acadiana Addiction Center, Solutions Recovery Center, and The Healing Link Recovery. Richard is also a veteran, serving seven (7) years in the US National Guard.

“Home cultivation can alleviate the financial burden on veterans who may be struggling with medical expenses directly related to their service to their country,” said Richard, adding, “By allowing veterans to grow their own medical marijuana, more veterans would have affordable access to the medicine they need.”

Richard has seen his share of trauma and the improvements cannabis-related therapies can offer some patients. Richard is now retired, but spent 33 years in counseling, holding certifications with the American College of Certified Forensic Counselors and serving as a Masters-level Addiction Counselor and Diplomat in the American Psychotherapy Association.

More patients require access and all patients require lower prices. While we appreciate having a medical marijuana program it serves little purpose if patients cannot afford it,” said Landry.

**CAPTIONS:** US Air Force Veteran Brandi Pett blowing her daughter a kiss from the stage at the 2020 Ms. Veteran America pageant. Pett snagged the title of “Hot Mama of the Year” Award.

## LEAVING LOUISIANA

“An ounce cost about \$150 where I live and work now,” said Orlando Wallace a member of the Veterans Action Council (VAC) and LVMC who served as a special guest speaker for the 2023 Veterans Rally.

“Here you can grow three plants as a medical patient,” added Wallace.

Wallace is an Air Force Veteran and 10-year Professional Firefighter. After being terminated in Louisiana for medical marijuana despite holding a valid recommendation, Wallace moved his family across the country where he no longer has to ration his medication due to cost or worry about marijuana’s undeserved stigma following him on the job.

Wallace also provided his testimony for last year’s Homegrow Sessions (LAMMJ, 2023), highlighting the need for patient home cultivation rights and employment protections for Louisiana veterans, firefighters, and first responders (Medical Marijuana Task Force, 2022).

“After 10 years of working in Baton Rouge, it hurt my soul that my whole family had to move so far from our home just so I don’t have to hurt everyday. MMJ is no big deal over here. In fact, my new station chief recommended all of the good dispensaries near me my first week on the job...that is how different it is everywhere else,” remarked Wallace.

“Many people, myself included, are looking to leave Louisiana because staying here means we hurt more and our families struggle, trying to pay these unnecessarily exorbitant prices,” said Broussard.

Patients are elderly. Patients are sick. Many patients live below the poverty level. Patients must live with family members because their fixed incomes cannot pay for independent housing, food, healthcare, and all the extra costs associated with chronic medical conditions, or the “disability tax” as some advocates refer to it.



“Patients cannot just shell out thousands of more dollars in expensive relocation costs,” Broussard added. “Many of us feel trapped and that our pleas for help have been completely ignored.”

“When I hear of patients ‘getting out,’ especially patient advocates like Orlando, I feel happy for them, but sad, too, because I know how hard it is to leave a state they love, their home, and their families,” said Broussard.

First responders and firefighters experience some of the worst on-the-job conditions, work-related injuries, and low pay. Patients on disability are extremely limited in their monthly budgets, many times barely able to afford food, housing, and prescriptions on low, fixed monthly incomes, many times below the poverty level.

“People will keep leaving Louisiana if everything is unaffordable. The safest thing people can do for all patients in both mental and physical pain or distress is make less harmful alternatives like marijuana accessible and cheap so they don’t suffer or seek out risky and possibly laced products from the Illicit Market. HOMEGROW solves these problems right now...not in five years,” said Landry, adding, “It also makes our state some money and doesn’t cost anything to implement.”

Cannabis reform is just one of many reasons people choose to leave Louisiana. Wallace’s departure for greener pastures is part of a larger, three-year trend: Louisiana lost about 14,000 Louisiana residents from 2022 to 2023 and demographer Greg Rigamer blamed it on the state’s economy (Foxx, 2023).

## Colorado

According to the Colorado Department of Revenue, the state’s 15% sales tax on \$1.4 billion in marijuana sales provided \$274 Million to the State of Colorado in 2023. Since the state began selling marijuana in 2014, it’s collected more than \$2.6 billion in tax revenue (Colorado Department of Revenue, 2024). Colorado residents over 21 can grow six (6) plants.

Colorado’s population grew by 36,571 according to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau (Mueller, 2024). Money from marijuana is paying for roads, school improvements, substance abuse treatment, not to mention the state-wide investment in industry and infrastructure that lures new families and well-paying employers to a state.

Colorado’s marijuana sales information is available to the current month and lists revenue/tax information down to the county/parish as well: [date:https://](https://)

[docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e8hnG64Vkg9ffgkNpKQ1kzPsXNbGjG2X/edit?rtpof=true&sd=true#gid=408181132](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e8hnG64Vkg9ffgkNpKQ1kzPsXNbGjG2X/edit?rtpof=true&sd=true#gid=408181132). Colorado is not alone as many states are demonstrating just how big marijuana money can get.

## Washington

Washington and Colorado were two (2) of the first states to legalize adult-use. According to State Treasurer Mike Pelicciotti, Washington state collected a total of \$468.5 million in legal marijuana income and license fees in fiscal year 2023, including \$4 million in cannabis license fees. In 2022, the state collected \$515.2 million in legal marijuana income, including \$4.1 million in cannabis license fees. The state has 854 processors/cultivators and has 476 retailers/dispensaries, selling an average of \$1 billion a year since 2019 (Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board Annual Report, 2023; Saldana, 2022).

According to the Washington State Department of Health, each patient is AUTOMATICALLY authorized to grow six (6) plants with the option of growing up to 15 with an extra signature on the patient's authorization form. According to the Washington State Cannabis Board, Washington has more than 600 dispensaries, 100 of which are medically endorsed.

While Louisiana is facing healthcare cuts and funding crises in the millions, ranking near the bottom in Women's health, Washington weed provided \$590 million for its state health care, with more than \$490 million of that money going to Washington State's Basic Health Plan Trust Account, providing health care for low-income individuals and people who lack health insurance coverage (Miller, 2023; Santos, 2021).

## \$\$\$ BIG MONEY IN MEDICAL MARIJUANA \$\$\$

## Arkansas

According to the Arkansas Department of Finance, Arkansas sold \$283 million worth of medical marijuana in 2023, selling \$276 million in 2022 (Kienlen, 2024). With an estimated 95,000 patients, medical marijuana provided Arkansas a total of \$31 million in tax revenue for 2023, netting the state \$120 million since opening its program in 2019—the same year Louisiana opened (Kienlen, 2024).

## Mississippi

“Just look next door at Mississippi,” said Landry. “It’s night and day over there.”

According to data from the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program’s “Business Search” feature and a report by Mississippi Medical Cannabis Advisory Committee Chairman Jeff Webb, less than one year after opening, Mississippi had 67 cultivators, 189 dispensaries, 28 processing facilities, four testing facilities/labs, and 25 transportation entities (2024; Harrison, 2024).

Mississippi’s had 31,305 registered patients and 189 caregivers. The state of Mississippi made more than \$37 million in medical-cannabis sales in less than a year the first year of operation; the state collected more than \$11 million in application fees as of December 20, 2023 (Harrison, 2024; Murphy, 2022; Mississippi Medical Marijuana Association, 2023). Many Louisiana patients were surprised and angered to see the difference in cost in neighboring states like Mississippi and Louisiana. Patients reported products (many times even the same brand) cost about half as much in Mississippi and Arkansas. Neighboring states also have many more options for affordable high-THC strains, which saves patients money because each bud of the medicinal plant is more potent requiring less to treat their conditions.

## HOW MUCH MARIJUANA CASH HAS LOUISIANA COLLECTED?

Unlike Louisiana’s neighboring states and almost all other states that legalize marijuana, Louisiana does not report to the public how much cash it collects from marijuana sales and this is raising alarms about how the state is not properly regulating an all cash industry owned by legislators and worth billions according to market analysts.

Since 2019 Louisiana only allows two cultivators: LSU and Southern University. LSU and Southern University get about \$4 million to provide their logos to the program; however, neither university actually grows medical marijuana for patients because they outsource it to two subcontractors, owned by legislators and their largest political campaign donors (Karlin, April 2, 2022).

## WELCOME TO LOUISIANA!

The legislator-owned monopoly is now branching out to dispensaries, quietly acquiring two of the state’s only 13 dispensaries according to the brand website.

“When every other state sells marijuana, everyone knows how much the state is collecting and where it is going. You can pull it up on any state website any time of the day, and see how much tax revenue it’s generating and how much

marijuana is sold, usually down to the month or year at least,” said Broussard, adding, “It’s crickets over here in Louisiana. They don’t report anything.”

## LOUISIANA HAS NEVER REPORTED MARIJUANA SALES

“When a state is selling marijuana, Louisiana citizens and Louisiana patients should know how much revenue marijuana is generating for the State of Louisiana, how much of that is in taxes, and where are those tax dollars going to help the state,” added Landry.

In fact, Louisiana has never once reported how much marijuana revenue has been collected since 2019, a figure easily available on all other state websites. Given other states’ yearly sales averages, this number could be anywhere from \$200 million a year to close to a billion dollars of mostly cash transactions with zero accountability or public financial reporting—far surpassing the “tens of millions” that politicians initially invested through several defunct companies, including GB Sciences Inc., Wellcana Plus LLC, and that was sold off in 2019 (Karlin, April 2, 2024; Mosbrucker, 2019).

The arrangement of the deal is confusing to most patients but reporter Kristen Mosbrucker wrote a summary of the people and creative math involved:

Wellcana, which had raised \$10 million...has more than 100 investors, including four former NFL players—among them a former LSU player and two former Saints players.

The financial terms of the November deal included a promissory note from Wellcana to GB Sciences for an \$8 million debt, with payments to begin on June 2020 until December 2021. The 50% interest Wellcana already had in GB Sciences Louisiana was put up by Wellcana as collateral for the promissory note.

In addition to what is essentially a loan, GB Sciences will be paid another \$8 million over time. Those payments will depend on how many patients have been sold medical marijuana and the profitability of the Louisiana operation.\*

\*Retrieved from: [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/business/gb-sciences-completes-16m-deal-with-lafayette-company-for-lsu-medical-marijuana-operation/article\\_f28d1d80-21bb-11ea-9649-5b5597fd3fbd.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/business/gb-sciences-completes-16m-deal-with-lafayette-company-for-lsu-medical-marijuana-operation/article_f28d1d80-21bb-11ea-9649-5b5597fd3fbd.html)

## LOUISIANA PATIENTS DEMAND EQUAL RIGHTS

Landry pointed out that Louisiana patients have been traveling and observing how differently patients in other states are being treated.

“Louisiana patients travel and when we visit other states we quickly realize how bad Louisiana patients are being treated and overcharged.”

“All we are asking for here is the same rights patients in many other states have,” said Landry, emphasizing that “Patients shouldn’t be penalized for living in Louisiana.”

“We want the opportunity to be a caregiver, growing for a fellow service member or family member. It’s not going to ruin Louisiana,” said Bales who also provided testimony at LVMC and LAMMJ’s Homegrow Sessions (2023).

According to data collected after more than 10 years of legalized marijuana in Colorado and Washington, opening dispensaries and even home cultivation of cannabis does not increase crime; researchers found that legalization was not associated with variations in crime rates (Harper & Jorgensen, 2022).

Property values don’t plummet—in fact, it’s the opposite,” said Bales, adding, “Go look for a house in Colorado. Look on Realtor.com and let me know how property values look over there.”

“Houses there cost a lot more than they do here. They are higher in value because those states are benefiting from sales taxes on recreational marijuana, too.”

After Colorado legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, home prices in areas that *allowed* dispensaries rose significantly faster than home prices in cities that *did not allow* marijuana sales (Mayer, 2017).

Surprisingly, realtors say that even former grow houses have no trouble selling—instead stating that home buyers are more turned off by the smell of tobacco (Witkowski & Weiner, 2023).

Louisiana is lagging behind other states like Ohio and Missouri, who just started their programs in 2023 and allowed patients to grow 12 plants before the dispensaries even opened.

“Growing 12 plants might seem like a lot but patients right now in Louisiana can possess five (5) ounces a month. Some strains can take nine months to grow and a patient experiencing pain 24/7, currently undergoing chemotherapy, or

living with conditions that cause seizures will blow through those five ounces every month,” said Broussard.

“Multiply that times two (2) patients in a single household and, with our state’s current limits, your household’s medical dose would be 10 ounces a month. That is nearly a pound a month, especially if there are three (3) patients.”

“Some patients may not tolerate smoking well, like the elderly, children, or patients who get their nutrition through an enteral tube, for example,” said Broussard.

“Right now high-dose tinctures, a product with a 600+ mg in THC, along with edible/vape-ready cannabis oils cost Louisiana patients more than \$100 whereas these products cost under \$40 in most medical markets, sometimes even going for \$25.”

“Who can afford this ridiculous Louisiana markup?” asked Landry.

“These are the most medicinal of all marijuana products because they are available to the youngest and most vulnerable of our patient groups...yet the pricing of tinctures and cannabis oils goes up! And remains sky high in Louisiana,” said Broussard.

“That is not market fluctuation. That is market manipulation,” added Landry who traveled to Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri last year on a patient visitor pass and was surprised at how much farther his dollars stretched just one state over.

“I was so surprised at how much more medication I could buy next door. The potency was so much stronger, too, so I had to consume much less to get the desired effect,” said Landry.

Patients blame the lack of incentive to cut prices and the overly inflated MMJ costs on the state’s ill-informed choice to limit cultivation to two (2) subcontractors.

“Patients should not bear the brunt of paying off legislators’ private business,” said Landry, adding “Many patients and veterans are extremely ill or living below the poverty level due to fixed incomes and their expensive lifelong medical conditions. Why are we being forced to pay off millionaires’ business gambles?”

“In Ohio, homegrowers can gift up to six plants to someone else. Can you imagine how much that would help Louisiana veterans and patients? asked Landry.

“Caregivers and patient growers could help the entire community and many patients have told me this would be ‘life-changing’ for them,” added Landry.

In other states, caregivers are allowed to cultivate medical marijuana for other patients. This arrangement enables patients who are elderly, lack space for cultivation, or are incapacitated to have a family member, friend, or caregiver grow the medication tailored to their needs. This ensures that they have access to strains that are most effective for their condition.

“We don’t want to leave out patients who are in care centers, too elderly or weak to tend their own gardens, or individuals who rent and are not allowed to grow due to their leases. In this case, CAREGIVERS, community or patient gardeners, who have the space, the knowledge, and the supplies could grow medical marijuana for patients.”

## HORTICULTURAL THERAPY GARDENS

“HOMEGROW is not just about money, although, it could save veterans thousands of dollars a month. It’s also about the community we could form and even more basic, the act of gardening and growing itself can be therapeutic,” added Bales who served in both Afghanistan and Iraq (2004-08) as a member of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Following World War II, “therapy gardens” significantly expanded acceptance of the practice for rehabilitative care of hospitalized war veterans in the 1940’s and 50’s, according to the American Horticultural Therapy Association.

Just like gardening as a hobby is therapeutic, the act of gardening your own medicine could relieve stress by allowing gardeners to be “in the moment,” to focus their minds on the fragrances, natural beauty, and physical touch which are “powerful antidotes to the negative sensations that re-terrify and fuel avoidance of life after trauma” (Drevitch, 2021). Like art therapy helps someone lose themselves in painting, gardening “equates to a connection beyond consciousness, the chance to experience a self beyond pain and loss” (Drevitch, 2021).

“In America, we lost 6,392 veterans to suicide in 2021. In Louisiana we lost 79. Countless other veterans become homeless, face hunger, and battle with addiction and isolation,” said Landry referencing the 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2024).

“Anything we can do to help people is better than taking no action at all,” added Landry.



Homegrowing medical marijuana is not a “fix all” for everyone and everything. Research shows, some veterans are reaping significant benefit by engaging in the practice of therapeutic horticulture (Eichholz, 2020).

Horticultural therapy can help everyone. “Ask yourself this: Who is going to tend to a garden better than a mother?” asked Broussard.

“I would use the least amount of pesticides. I would pick the best strains for our conditions. I would do that for under \$200 a month...which is much better than the \$2,000–\$3,000 we are currently being up-charged to payback some politicians’ imaginary loan.”

“Winn Dixie sells chicken breasts and that didn’t put Popeye’s out of business last I checked,” said Broussard. “HOMEGROW is not going to cut into the monopoly’s hundreds of millions.”

“Legal drugs, like opioids, alcohol, and tobacco—this is what is taking so many lives,” said Landry. “Homegrow is basically gardening.”

“It’s a sad double-standard,” added Landry, “During this crisis, the Opioid Epidemic continues to claim lives. It’s inhumane to criminalize homegrown medical cannabis while anybody can brew 100 gallons of beer in their garage.”

“There is no silver bullet to fix everything,” said Landry, “But, homegrown medicine is a safe and cost-effective tool in fighting the skyrocketing opioid/fentanyl overdoses, drunk-driving traffic fatalities, and alcohol-related violence,” Landry said.

“Louisiana patients deserve dignity and better treatment from our leaders. We won’t be passive targets despite our struggles with illnesses,” Landry insisted.

“Affordable homegrown medicine is many patients’ only hope to afford their medication,” said Landry.

“I urge people to act. People always say to me that they want to help our veterans. Well, this is something you can do to help veterans and patients in Louisiana right now. Come listen to the great lineup of speakers we have at the rally, watch it online LIVE, and please reach out to your representatives... Call them, email them, meet with them and please tell them to let Louisiana patients HOMEGROW!” urged Landry.

The rally starts at 8:30 AM on March 11, 2024, in Veterans’ Circle on the grounds of the Louisiana State Capitol. Organizers will be hosting lives on various social media platforms and recording the event for virtual participants that can not make the event in person.

Rally Organizers invite the public to this peaceful and educational celebration of MMJ's therapeutic potential and to listen to speakers on a range of HOMEGROW related-topics.

**A FULL LIST OF SPEAKERS WITH BIOS + A/V SAMPLES IS AVAILABLE ON  
[WWW.LAMMJ.ORG/VETERANSRALLY](http://WWW.LAMMJ.ORG/VETERANSRALLY)**

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## HELP LINES

**If you're a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one,  
contact the Veterans Crisis Line**

to receive 24/7 confidential support.

You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect.

**To reach responders,  
Dial 988 then Press 1**

**Chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat)  
or Text 838255**

**The Veterans Crisis Line is Available 24/7/365**

Additional suicide prevention resources can be found  
on [MentalHealth.VA.gov/suicide\\_prevention](https://MentalHealth.VA.gov/suicide_prevention)

***If you are not a veteran, help is still available***

24 hours a day, 7 days a week in English and Spanish

Speak with someone today

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

CALL 988 or Chat online at [988lifeline.org/chat](https://988lifeline.org/chat)

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## PATIENT HOMEGROW DREAMS

### PATIENT HOMEGROW REGISTRATION

- Six (6) Mature Plants per Patient
- Six (6) Seedlings + Six (6) Clones per Patient
- Up to Two (2) Patients per Household
- Twelve (12) Flowering Plants per Household

### PATIENT HOMEGROW REGISTRATION FEES

- \$100 Patient HOMEGROW Registration
- Good for 24 Months
- Up to two (2) Patients per Household, Max 12 Plants
- \*\*FREE HOMEGROW Registration for veterans, patients under 21 years of age, or adults in lifelong tutorships

### CAREGIVER HOMEGROW REGISTRATION

- Up to Six (6) Patients
- Eight(8) Mature Plants + (8) Eight Seedlings
- + Eight (8) Eight Clones Per Patient
- 50 Flowering Plants Total Allowed
- Caregivers may donate up to six (6) plants to veterans, minors, adults living in lifelong tutorships, or patients living below the National Poverty Standard, earning less than \$35,000 a year

### CAREGIVER FEES

- \$100 Up to (3) Three Patients
- \$300 (4) Four - (6) Six Patients
- Good for 24 Months
- \*\*50% Caregiver HOMEGROW Registration if patient roster includes veterans, adults living in lifelong tutorships, or minors

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## FACTS ABOUT NARCAN/NALOXONE

### Obtained from the National Institute on Drug Abuse

- Naloxone is a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose. It attaches to opioid receptors and reverses and blocks the effects of other opioids.
- Naloxone is a safe medicine. It only reverses overdoses in people with opioids in their systems.
- There are two FDA-approved formulations of naloxone: injectable and prepackaged nasal spray.
- Police officers, emergency medical technicians, and first responders are trained on how to give naloxone.
- In some states, friends and family members can be trained on how to give naloxone.
- Naloxone only works in the body for 30 to 90 minutes. It is possible for a person to still experience the effects of an overdose after naloxone wears off or need multiple doses if a potent opioid is in a person's system.
- In some areas, you can get naloxone from pharmacies with or without a personal prescription from community-based distribution programs, or local health departments. Anyone can get this medication **without a prescription** to keep on hand for emergency situations. The cost of Naloxone is covered by Medicaid in Louisiana.
- Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is an FDA approved medication that reverses opioid overdose. It works by blocking and/or reversing the effects of synthetic opioids in the human body for 30 to 90 minutes. If the person has taken a large amount of fentanyl or another powerful opioid, the effects of Naloxone can wear off after this time period, and the person can begin experiencing overdose symptoms again.
- Naloxone can be administered as an intravenous injection or as a nasal spray.

### FORM MORE INFORMATION:

<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/naloxone>

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