



POT & WORK

5 SMALL LOCAL FIRMS PLEDGE NOT TO FIRE WORKERS FOR USING MEDICAL MARIJUANA

BY ALEXIA ELEJALDE-RUIZ | Chicago Tribune

With all the concerns confronting Illinois' medical cannabis pilot program — not enough patients, not enough qualifying conditions, not enough time — a handful of Chicago-area employers want their workers to know that they don't have to worry about job security.

Five small companies — a law firm, a real estate services firm, two health care organizations and a nightclub — have announced their intentions to support employees who use medical marijuana. It's a tangled topic across the country, with state laws permitting pot use clashing with federal laws that don't, and employers seeking to balance employee needs and rights against workplace safety.

Feliza Castro, founder of The Healing Clinic, which helps people register for cannabis cards, and Justice for Patients, a nonprofit advocacy group, recruited the companies to go public with their decisions in hopes that they will set an example for others to follow.

"The best way to support the nondiscrimination of these employees and to support reasonable HR policies that are inclusive of these patients is to go ahead and announce it," said Jonathan Spero, CEO of InHouse Physicians, one of the companies on Castro's list.

InHouse Physicians, a health care solutions company based in St. Charles that employs about 250 people, has added language to its human resources handbook to accommodate employees' medical pot use, including

Turn to *Marijuana*, Page 2

Pot and Work

5 Small Local Firms Pledge Not to Fire Workers for Using Medical Marijuana

By Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz | Chicago Tribune

Card won't protect workers' marijuana use

Marijuana, from Page 1

While they're at the office, Spero said. It states that employees will not be subject to any disciplinary actions for using cannabis while on the job as long as they have a current, legitimate medical cannabis card, he said.

Spero, who has been helping Castro's Healing Clinic recruit physicians for over a year, said employees will be subject to the same performance requirements, so if the type of cannabis they use does have psychoactive effects that hurt day-to-day performance, there could be consequences.

But he doesn't want to know what medications his employees are taking, seeing it as a violation of privacy rights.

"Unfortunately, I have the feeling it's going to take the first employee to fail a drug test due to their legal marijuana use for (employers) to look at their policies."

— A founding partner of a cannabis-focused law firm

Attorney Stuart Krauskopf, who employs 12 people at his River North law practice, said his employees' health is a priority, and anything they need to do to be comfortable is fine with him.

'It is based on complete mutual respect, and the idea is that I don't have to interfere in their well-being,' said Krauskopf, who has Crohn's disease and understands what it is like to be in pain, though he has elected not to join the medical marijuana program.

His firm does not have a formal drug policy and will

address issues as they arise on a case-by-case basis, Krauskopf said, though he expects he won't permit people to use marijuana while at the office, in case clients drop by. As for concerns about potential legal consequences if mistakes are made and blamed on an employee's impairment, he said he isn't worried, because nothing gets sent to clients without his seeing it first.

The other companies on Castro's list are Chicago-based chiropractic company Universal Wellness Source, River North nightclub

Lite Chicago, and Highland Park-based Frontline Real Estate Partners.

Castro, who sought out local companies across several industries, said it was difficult to find companies to publicly announce what she calls 'compassionate policies,' even if they have them in place.

She hopes the initial five encourage others to follow suit. The most common question she receives at The Healing Clinic is whether a medical marijuana card will protect a patient from getting in trouble at work.

The short answer is that it does not. Illinois' statute gives employers the flexibility to determine whether and how to accommodate employees who use medical marijuana.

While companies cannot discriminate against anyone for having a patient card, they can still impose drug tests and fire people who fail them, regardless of their card-carrying status.

Lawsuits filed in other states protesting terminations for legal medical marijuana use have tended to go in favor of employers.

A founding partner of a cannabis-focused law firm said employers should think about what their employees' needs and responsibilities are and formulate policies

accordingly. Companies where workers operate heavy machinery daily, for instance, will likely have a different approach from those with office jobs.

Time will tell if this becomes an issue in Illinois, as dispensaries opened only three months ago and the state has announced just over 4,000 qualifying patients so far. But the attorney said she has not sensed that employers want to address the issue quickly.

'Unfortunately, I have the feeling it's going to take the first employee to fail a drug test due to their legal marijuana use for them to look at their policies,' she said.

*aelejalderuiz@tribpub.com
Credit: Chicago Tribune*

Card won't protect workers' marijuana use

"At a time when patients could legally use medical cannabis yet still feared losing their livelihoods, I brought employers to the table and asked them to lead with compassion. We weren't merely navigating a new industry—we were helping define the principles it would stand for."

FELIZA CASTRO | REFLECTING ON THE COVERAGE

Feliza Castro once again commanded the front page of the Chicago Tribune's Business section—this time by turning patient advocacy into trailblazing workplace action. Through The Healing Clinic and Justice for Patients, Castro recruited five Chicago-area employers to publicly support employees who legally used medical cannabis.

Her work challenged businesses to recognize that patients deserved employment security, dignity and compassionate workplace policies as Illinois entered a new medical era.

PRESERVED BY FELIZA CASTRO | FOUNDER, THE HEALING CLINIC

Pot and work: 5 small firms pledge not to fire workers for using medical marijuana

Elejalde-Ruiz, Alexia . Elejalde-Ruiz, Alexia.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT

Five small companies -- a law firm, a real estate services firm, two health care organizations and a nightclub -- have announced their intentions to support employees who use medical marijuana.

FULL TEXT

Feb. 05--With all the concerns confronting Illinois' medical cannabis pilot program -- not enough patients, not enough qualifying conditions, not enough time -- a handful of Chicago-area employers want their workers to know that they don't have to worry about job security.

Five small companies -- a law firm, a real estate services firm, two health care organizations and a nightclub -- have announced their intentions to support employees who use medical marijuana. It's a tangled topic across the country, with state laws permitting pot use clashing with federal laws that don't, and employers seeking to balance employee needs and rights against workplace safety.

Feliza Castro, founder of The Healing Clinic, which helps people register for cannabis cards, and Justice for Patients, a nonprofit advocacy group, recruited the companies to go public with their decisions in hopes that they will set an example for others to follow.

"The best way to support the nondiscrimination of these employees and to support reasonable HR policies that are inclusive of these patients is to go ahead and announce it," said Jonathan Spero, CEO of InHouse Physicians, one of the companies on Castro's list.

InHouse Physicians, a health care solutions company based in St. Charles that employs about 250 people, has added language to its human resources handbook to accommodate employees' medical pot use, including while they're at the office, Spero said.

It states that employees will not be subject to any disciplinary actions for using cannabis while on the job as long as they have a current, legitimate medical cannabis card, he said.

Spero, who has been helping Castro's Healing Clinic recruit physicians for over a year, said employees will be subject to the same performance requirements, so if the type of cannabis they use does have psychoactive effects that hurt day-to-day performance, there could be consequences.

But he doesn't want to know what medications his employees are taking, seeing it as a violation of privacy rights.

Attorney Stuart Krauskopf, who employs 12 people at his River North law practice, said his employees' health is a priority,

and anything they need to do to be comfortable is fine with him.

"It is based on complete mutual respect, and the idea is that I don't have to interfere in their well-being," said Krauskopf, who has Crohn's disease and understands what it is like to be in pain, though he has elected not to join the medical marijuana program.

His firm does not have a formal drug policy and will address issues as they arise on a case-by-case basis, Krauskopf said, though he expects he won't permit people to use marijuana while at the office, in case clients drop by. As for concerns about potential legal consequences if mistakes are made and blamed on an employee's impairment, he said he isn't worried, because nothing gets sent to clients without his seeing it first.

The other companies on Castro's list are Chicago-based chiropractic company Universal Wellness Source, River North nightclub Lite Chicago, and Highland Park-based Frontline Real Estate Partners.

Castro, who sought out local companies across several industries, said it was difficult to find companies to publicly announce what she calls "compassionate policies," even if they have them in place.

She hopes the initial five encourage others to follow suit. The most common question she receives at The Healing Clinic is whether a medical marijuana card will protect a patient from getting in trouble at work.

The short answer is that it does not. Illinois' statute gives employers the flexibility to determine whether and how to accommodate employees who use medical marijuana. While companies cannot discriminate against anyone for having a patient card, they can still impose drug tests and fire people who fail them, regardless of their card-carrying status.

Lawsuits filed in other states protesting terminations for legal medical marijuana use have tended to go in favor of employers.

A founding partner of a recently launched cannabis-focused law firm in Chicago's Fulton Market district said employers should think about what their employees' needs and responsibilities are and formulate policies accordingly. Companies where workers operate heavy machinery daily, for instance, will likely have a different approach from those with office jobs.

Time will tell if this becomes an issue in Illinois, as dispensaries opened only three months ago and the state has announced just over 4,000 qualifying patients so far. But the attorney said she has not sensed that employers want to address the issue quickly.

"Unfortunately, I have the feeling it's going to take the first employee to fail a drug test due to their legal marijuana use for them to look at their policies," she said.

aelejalderuiz@tribpub.com

Credit: Chicago Tribune

DETAILS

Presentation-copy note: One quoted source is identified by role rather than name in this copy. The quote itself is unchanged. The original archival file is preserved separately.



PDF GENERATED BY PROQUEST.COM

Page 2 of 3

Business indexing term:	Subject: Employers Law firms Employees Nightclubs; Industry: 54111 : Offices of Lawyers 72241 : Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)
Subject:	Drug legalization; Medical marijuana; Employers; Law firms; Employees; Patients; Drug testing; Nightclubs
Location:	Illinois; United States--US
Publication title:	TCA Regional News; Chicago
Publication year:	2016
Publication date:	Feb 5, 2016
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Chicago
Country of publication:	United States
Publication subject:	Business And Economics
Source type:	Wire Feed
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	1762746594
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/centralnew/wire-feeds/pot-work-5-small-firms-pledge-not-fire-workers/docview/1762746594/sem-2?accountid=10477
Copyright:	_(c)2016 the Chicago Tribune Visit the Chicago Tribune at www.chicagotribune.com Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.
Last updated:	2024-11-27
Database:	ProQuest Central Premium

LINKS

[Find full text @ DePaul](#)

Database copyright © 2026 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)

← Back to Press Archive



PDF GENERATED BY PROQUEST.COM

Page 3 of 3