

Alaska State Legislature

Interim:
716 W 4th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-0174
Fax: (907) 269-0177



Session:
State Capitol, Suite 406
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 465-3783
Fax: (907) 465-2293

REPRESENTATIVE LISA MURKOWSKI GOVERNMENT HILL • ELMENDORF • EAST ANCHORAGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 17, 2002

CONTACT: Rep. Lisa Murkowski (907) 465-3783

House Eases Burden for Marijuana Evidence **HB 373 Would Lower State Costs to Prosecute Pot Growers**

(JUNEAU) – Police fighting Alaska’s illegal marijuana-growing industry could process and preserve only as much of the contraband plants as they needed to charge defendants, and then destroy the rest, under a bill the House passed unanimously today.

Alaska is currently the only state in which police seizing marijuana plants as part of an arrest must process the plants into the drug’s commonly used form so it can be measured and the appropriate charge filed, a process that takes 9,000 man-hours and \$250,000 in personnel costs each year for Alaska State Troopers and other law enforcement personnel, said Rep. Lisa Murkowski (R-Anchorage), who sponsored House Bill 373.

“It is absurd that the laws we employ to discourage people from growing illegal drugs in our state essentially require the state to operate a full-fledged marijuana processing facility,” Murkowski said. “House Bill 373 makes a common-sense change that lets the state save what it needs to prosecute a case, and get rid of the rest.”

Alaska has the dubious distinction of being one of the most active states for indoor cultivation of marijuana, Murkowski said. The scope of the problem became clear to her a few years ago, she said, when drug enforcement agents took her on a field trip to a massive warehouse where marijuana plants are taken to be dried, the buds and leaves stripped and the material weighed before it can be used as evidence to support criminal charges.

The waste in time, manpower and expense prompted her to introduce HB 373 to bring Alaska’s marijuana evidence laws into line with those used by other states and the federal government, she said. HB 373 would allow police to take samples and photographs of such plants, then process and save only the processed amount necessary to charge the defendant.

The bill also makes changes to state law regarding the definition, forfeiture and disposal of contraband.

[HB 373](#) moves next to the Senate for consideration.

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