

Dear Mayor and City Council,

January 17, 2012

RE: Discrimination Against People with Disabilities

This past three-day weekend was a celebration of the prophet, the peace-maker, and Nobel award recipient Martin Luther King Jr. It was a commemoration of his great speeches and of the advancements he accomplished in the name of civil rights. It was a memorial to the man who led a peaceful 250,000-strong march on Washington D.C. and emblazoned upon the memory of this nation that he had a Dream. His was a dream that included all peoples, especially those who might be considered "different."

This Dream illuminated the considerable bigotry and prejudice at the time; and yet King found a way to focus on a positive path for this country to follow.

I can remember a time when Negroes were only allowed to live in a certain part of town. Asians and Hispanics were heavily discriminated against. Japanese-American citizens had just been released from their prison camps and were shunned by many. Gays were not allowed to teach in schools, adopt children, or serve in the military and were heavily stereotyped; it was believed by many that they would corrupt our children. Physically and mentally disabled people were deprived of jobs, ridiculed and denied access to many services. Corporate greed, yellow journalism and a nonsensical movie called "Reefer Madness" fostered many irrational myths about a healing herbal medicine and the people who used it.

And, this all took place in California. In other states, matters were far worse.

In a revolutionary move, the Civil Rights Act was promoted by John F. Kennedy and finally enacted in 1964. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed in 1990 and California State Unruh Act legislated in 1959 were designed to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities and provide an avenue for them to have equal /comparable access. Proposition 215, called The 1996 Compassionate Use Act, allowed for qualified medical marijuana patients to legally partake of their medicine. In 2003, CA Senate Bill 420 clarified many aspects of Prop 215.

Change did not happen overnight, but over the years the vast citizenry has become much more aware and accepting of those who are distinctive.

The City of Long Beach's motto is "Working Together to Serve"—that means to serve all citizens, not just to serve those who fit into our personal agendas. On the City's web page, it states, "The City of Long Beach is committed to complying with both the intent and the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act." That also means that medical cannabis patients should have equivalent access to their physician-recommended medicine as others have to prescribed pharmaceuticals.

Prejudice against any group of people is just plain wrong. And, I have a dream that one day all people with disabilities and/or who are ill will be treated with the respect they deserve and judged by the content of their character, not by the medicine they need. I have a dream that they will no longer be discriminated against and can, without fear of persecution, have unfettered access to whatever medicine eases their suffering.

Yours truly, Diana Lejins

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