DEA Notifies Marijuana Dispensaries Within 1000 Feet of School

Local News

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Washington DC - The Drug Enforcement Administration yesterday sent notification letters to the operators and property owners of 23 marijuana store fronts located in school zones. The letters informed the owner/operators that such enterprises operating as “dispensaries” within 1,000 feet of a school, playground or other prohibited area could result in the seizure and forfeiture of assets, as well as criminal prosecution. The seizure could include the property where the storefront operates, any money received from the enterprise, and potential criminal prosecution. The letter informs dispensary operators and property owners to cease the sale and distribution of marijuana within 30 days.The following is a statement from Jenny A. Durkan, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington:“We all work hard to create a safe zone for kids in school. There is a reason that both federal and state laws prohibit sales of marijuana in school zones. We need to enforce one message for our students: drugs have no place in or near our schools.”

The following is a statement from Matthew G. Barnes, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Seattle Division:“Today, the DEA sent notifications to operators and property owners of publicly accessible marijuana storefronts to highlight potential criminal and civil penalties associated with the distribution of marijuana. These particular locations are close to schools and/or playgrounds and are operating in clear violation of federal and state law. Operation of any marijuana distribution storefront is illegal and undermines law enforcement’s efforts to regulate the possession, manufacturing and trafficking of controlled substances to keep our citizens safe. This letter seeks voluntary compliance with the law to prevent future exposure to criminal prosecution and/or civil forfeiture proceedings. I am confident that once notified of the ramifications and penalties associated with renting a property for marijuana distribution purposes, property owners will take appropriate steps to rectify the situation on their own. The DEA will not turn a blind eye to criminal organizations that attempt to use state or local law as a shield for their illicit drug trafficking activities. Additional notifications will be sent as necessary with follow-up action taken as warranted in coordination with the United States Attorney’s Office, Western District of Washington.”Federal law, which prohibits the distribution, possession or manufacture of controlled substances, provides enhanced penalties when such activities occur near an educational facility or playground (21 U.S.C. § 860(a)). Furthermore, federal law makes it illegal to knowingly and intentionally rent or lease property for the purpose of unlawfully distributing, possessing or manufacturing a controlled substance (21 U.S.C. § 856(a)), and provides that real property used in such a manner can be forfeited to the United States (21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(7)).A sample copy of the letter is attached to this press release.Press contact for the U.S. Attorney’s Office is Emily Langlie, (206) 553-4110 or Emily.langlie@usdoj.gov. Press contact for DEA is Jodie Underwood, (206) 553-1162 or Jodie.Underwood@usdoj.gov.