

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) directive to agency lawyers not to prosecute individuals who use or prescribe medical marijuana in states that have legalized the drug for that purpose. Hinchey has long led the effort in Congress to mandate such a policy, offering an amendment in the House to the DOJ spending bill that would prohibit the DOJ from using any of its funds to prosecute individuals who use medical marijuana in compliance with state law. With some uncertainty earlier this year surrounding the Obama administration's policy on medical marijuana, Hinchey secured House approval of a provision he authored that requires the DOJ to report the administration's position in writing to Congress within 60 days of the bill's enactment.

"Today, common sense won out over ideological stubbornness as our nation's law enforcement agency formally adopted a new and well-balanced policy on medical marijuana use. Across the country, individual states have enacted laws that allow individuals who are sick and suffering to use medical marijuana with a doctor's prescription only to have DOJ officials arrest and prosecute them anyway. This was a policy that was misguided and wrong from the start and I'm very pleased that the Obama administration's Justice Department, under the leadership of Attorney General Holder, has put an end to it.

"It is unconscionable that the federal government had previously sought to not only deny, but arrest and prosecute medical marijuana patients who are using the drug in accordance with state law to relieve pain and nausea associated with debilitating illnesses such as cancer, AIDS, and multiple sclerosis. Today, those patients no longer have to worry that the medicine they've been legally using in their states will result in them being thrown in jail. Our Justice Department will now let these patients use medical marijuana in accordance with state law and federal prosecutors will instead focus their attention on more pressing legal matters that warrant their time and attention."