

# Medical Marijuana Advocate

*Former talk show host Montel Williams says treatment helps his MS*

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## **ALBANY -- Former talk-show host Montel Williams visited the Capitol to support a medical marijuana bill moving through the Legislature.**

Williams discussed his own experience since he began grappling with multiple sclerosis a decade ago, joined by Manhattan Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, a prime sponsor of the state measure.

Medical marijuana "changed my life -- it allowed me to have my life back," said Williams, who shows few visible signs of the degenerative condition except for a slight wobble in his stride. He said that many days use of marijuana suppresses his pain enough to allow him to "get out of bed, go to work and pay my taxes."

New York would be the 15th state to pass some form of legalization. "It's a little late, but at least we'll get it done," Williams said, adding that he's promoted the effort in nine states.

"New York got it right," Williams said of the bill, which would make pharmacies the distributors of the new form of medication. It would also tightly restrict the number of conditions for which people would be eligible for treatment. The bill language specifies "a severe debilitating or life-threatening condition, or a condition associated with or a complication of such a condition or its treatment (including but not limited to inability to tolerate food, nausea, vomiting, dysphoria or pain)."

In comparison, California's treatable ailments include anorexia and migraine as well as many other chronic and debilitating conditions.

Gottfried called New York's bill "the narrowest and most restrictive medical marijuana law in the country." He said it would be "extraordinarily cruel" for the state to go another year without passing the measure, which has been approved by the Assembly multiple times and is currently before the Senate Rules Committee.

"This is not about a bunch of potheads -- that's not going to happen here," said Williams, who noted that although he lives in New York he is a registered participant in California's program because his corporation is chartered in the Golden State. So how does his medication get here? "Somehow, it's like the Tooth Fairy -- it arrives in New York," he said.

The legislation is backed by the state Pharmacists Society, whose Executive Director Craig Burrige appeared at the Capitol with Williams, Burrige noted that his wife was suffering from lung cancer -- a condition that could be ameliorated by medical marijuana.

"The patient comes first," Burrige said.

The bill is opposed by groups such as the state Society of Addiction Medicine.