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Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Joint Session, Medical Health Community and Judiciary Committee

Good Morning, Ladies and Gentleman:

My name is Dr. Robert Matylewicz. I am an addiction medicine physician practicing addiction medicine in the state of Pennsylvania. I have been practicing addiction medicine for over ten years in this Commonwealth. I treat patients from all over the country and internationally here at our facility in Pennsylvania. Clarity Way is a 29-bed inpatient detoxification and residential treatment facility that is part of the Elements Behavioral Health Care System. I would like to thank you today for the opportunity to speak to you on the practical implications of the implementation of the legalization of medical marijuana and its impact on health care professionals if medical cannabis is legalized in Pennsylvania.

Any time a new drug is introduced into our society it undergoes a rigorous screening process through the FDA, through a series of clinical trials, ultimately becoming available to our citizens. Many professionals are standing before you today testifying how medical cannabis affects their various specialties and how it will affect the patients that they treat. Some will tell you that they see great benefits and great relief to their patients. Others, such as myself, are unsure at this time. The reason that I am unsure at this time is I treat a different cross-section of society. I treat those that suffer from the disease of addiction. By definition, addiction is a chronic, progressive medical illness characterized by neurological changes in the brain and if left untreated ultimately leads to death. Not unlike other diseases, our goal is to identify the addiction, treat it appropriately, and put the disease in an arrested state so that our patients may go on and continue to live a productive life.

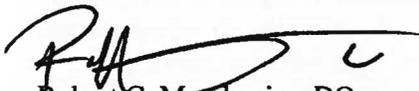
As a physician I have no doubt there will be treatments presented before us that we will have to carefully review to make sure they are appropriate for members of our society. What I can say to you today is simply that I treat addiction. I treat patients from across the country that have legalized medical marijuana in their respective states. A lot of those patients that I treat present with polysubstance dependency or polypharmacy. What that means is they are addicted to many substances. In of those substances, I often see patients presenting with a diagnosis of cannabis dependency, and while some of them have obtained medical cards from their respective states to obtain marijuana, most of these patients do not have a legitimate medical condition that they have obtained that medical card to treat. In fact, most of the patients that I have encountered have obtained their medical card not from their primary care physician, but from other physicians in the community who are willing to certify that the individual has met criteria for treatment with medical cannabis. Any time that we have seen increased availability of a drug, we have seen increase in diversion of that. I think all of us remember the 1990s when OxyContin came to the market. It was the first time that a product was brought to the market with concentrated doses of oxycodone. Yes, oxycodone is a much more potent, addictive substance. It was the first time that a drug became available legitimately and became widely diverted. What I am saying is that before we can proceed we need to make sure that there are mechanisms in place to prevent diversion. I think all of us believe that there needs to be more outcome research done on medical cannabis. I realize there are many

obstacles to researching this drug and those obstacles include the Federal Controlled Substance Act of 1970 and the drug currently being a schedule 1 substance. I know there are many physicians that are researching this as best they can. What I am saying is that I am aware that many researchers are looking into the medical benefits of cannabinoids and their various properties. There is no doubt in my mind that the substances or the products in cannabis are helpful. I see the benefits for those that suffer from epilepsy. I see some of the unique cases where it has provided relief. In fact, the testimony today before other members also will support that. However, what I am saying is that legalization of medical cannabis will increase availability of that product within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and whenever we see availability of a drug that can be abused, we will see increase in diversion of that drug. I have seen it already. I have treated patients from other states and I have seen how individuals will obtain medical cards fraudulently, ultimately leading to an increased burden on our health care system.

In closing, I would like to thank you for listening to my concerns on how the legalization of medical cannabis will affect individuals within our health care system.

I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Matylewicz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert C. Matylewicz, DO  
Medical Director, Clarity Way, Inc.

Diplomate, American Board of Addiction Medicine

RM/jb