



Families of Addiction

York County
South Central Region
Hanover, Pennsylvania 17331

Martha L. King, Advisory Board Member
P.O. Box 512, Hanover, PA. 17331
advocacymom@embarqmail.com

November 20, 2009

Honorable Frank Oliver
Room 34, East Wing
PO Box 202195
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2195

Dear Honorable Representative Oliver,

I am writing concerning HB 1393, providing for the medical use of marijuana. I would like my letter submitted as written testimony for the hearing on HB1393 on December 2, 2009. To "legalize" marijuana for medical use would be doing a great disservice to the entire state of Pennsylvania. Every day more and more of our youth become addicted to illicit drugs and they all begin this addiction with the three gateway drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. As a mother touched by this disease from a child and involved in substance abuse prevention we send a very clear message to the youth we educate that the use of marijuana can lead to the use of other illegal substances.

Marijuana is one of many addictive drugs and is classified as such with good reason. As stated by the Drug Enforcement Administration "marijuana has a high potential for abuse, has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States, and has a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision." The negative effect of using the substance for medicinal purposes outweighs any possible positive benefits that may be experienced. Even under the proposed disguise of medicinal marijuana, the side effects of using the drug will continue to be: higher risk of lung cancer, heart attacks, breathing difficulties, strokes, and overdoses and death from these complications.

Having said this, let's ask ourselves (from the Drug Free American Foundation):

Does marijuana have medicinal value?

- **Smoking is an ineffective and illogical way to deliver medicine** – dosage cannot be regulated, and tar and other harmful compounds are delivered directly to the lungs along with any helpful cannabinoids (compounds in marijuana).
- In fact, Dr. Robert DuPont, former director of NIDA, says, "There is no acceptable role in modern medicine for using burning leaves as a drug delivery system because **smoke is inherently unhealthy.**"
- Other delivery methods aren't safer either; **vaporizing does not filter** cancer-causing tar or other chemicals, and **eating delivers the same damaging compounds** as well as the insecticides and fungi found in unmonitored crops.
- Clinical research is being conducted into a **controlled, tested, safe delivery system** (that can be prescribed and managed) of the helpful cannabinoids of marijuana without any of the harmful chemicals or dangerous side effects.

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Don't doctors prescribe marijuana?

- **No. Doctors cannot prescribe a non-FDA approved substance;** in medical excuse marijuana states only, they can recommend it.
- **The FDA issued a statement against the use of smoked marijuana** in 2006, and the **Institute of Medicine** study from 1999 found that marijuana should be researched but **not used as a medicine in its raw form.**
- Doctors are **not covered by insurance** for recommending a non-FDA approved drug, and there is an undetermined impact on a patient's right to sue for malpractice.
- Although many support cannabinoid research, most of the **major medical associations in the US are against the use of smoked or raw marijuana.**

Doesn't marijuana help with some diseases?

- **Cancer and HIV/AIDS** – The pill form of the active chemical in marijuana (dronabinol) can be helpful for the nausea associated with chemotherapy or the wasting disease that appears with AIDS, but many other medicines that have been tested as safe and more effective are preferred by oncologists. Smoked marijuana has been proven to damage the immune system, cause premalignant cellular changes in the lungs and impair lung function, leaving immune-suppressed patients more vulnerable to infection.
- **Multiple sclerosis** – Patients in various stages of the disease may perceive that their spasticity is partially relieved, but studies show that spasticity is made worse, not better.
- **Chronic pain** – Not in its raw form with accompanying undesirable side effects, but there are hopeful studies in animals that suggest a molecule similar to the cannabinoids in marijuana could be isolated and used in pain relief. The lead researcher cautions: "It is a big step to go from a successful animal model to treating humans in pain."
- **Glaucoma** – Smoked marijuana has never been shown to be better or even just as good as existing drugs for relieving eye pressure, and its use brings with it many more side effects than the approved medicines.

What are the risks of smoking marijuana?

- **Physical** – Respiratory damage, increased risk of lung cancer, increased heart rate, reproductive damage in both sexes and immunosuppression.
- **Psychological** – Paranoia, emotional disorders, increased risk of schizophrenia and other neuropsychiatric disorders, memory loss, increased tolerance to intoxication, addiction to marijuana and other drugs (especially with its increasing potency), loss of ability to concentrate and loss of inhibition.
- **Legal** – No matter what laws are passed locally or statewide, marijuana is illegal on the federal level - a ruling upheld by the Supreme Court and enforced by federal officials.

But how can a naturally grown herb be harmful?

- Arsenic and belladonna are naturally occurring also and quite lethal. **Many medicines are derived from plants but are neither safe nor distributed in their raw form** because of complications with dosage measurements and negative side effects.
- **Tobacco** is a plant that grows naturally and was once thought to be safe, even medicinal, but has caused a great deal of damage to our society.

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- **Alcohol** is a natural result of the fermentation process, but we pay a heavy price for its legal abuse.

Since raw marijuana isn't a medicine, why do some people want to "medicalize" it?

- Many who claim to need marijuana medicinally simply want to **use it recreationally**. In states with marijuana dispensaries, the vast majority of "patients" are young men between the ages of 18 and 25, not the cancer or AIDS victims used in voter ads to exploit our compassionate nature.
- The claim that smoked marijuana is medicinal is a **tactic to legalize marijuana for any purpose** and to eventually legalize other drugs for personal use.
- There is great potential to **make a lot of money** through the sale of marijuana. Tobacco companies, who made a killing on cigarettes to the detriment of so many, have already patented names for marijuana products.

But isn't allowing marijuana for the treatment of health problems a compassionate thing to do?

- Not really. "Medicalizing" this harmful substance has caused truly ill people to refuse proper medical care, thinking that because marijuana makes them feel better they are getting better. Medical practitioners and others who are truly concerned for the sick have **higher standards and greater compassion** – we want the ill to receive the medicine they need.
- The medical excuse marijuana movement has become a device used by special interest groups to **exploit the sick and dying and well-meaning voters** for their own purposes.
- Rev. Scott Imler, Co-Founder of Prop 215 (California's medical marijuana law) said, "We created Prop 215 so that patients would not have to deal with black market profiteers. But today **it is all about the money**. Most of the dispensaries operating in California are little more than dope dealers with store fronts."

Please explain to me; I do not understand why this issue is being addressed by our state legislators. If marijuana is to be used for medical purposes shouldn't the FDA make this decision? Aren't they responsible for controlling what drugs are safe? I have never heard anyone say that "smoking" is good for anyone's health especially when they are suffering from other illnesses. Is this a ploy for this to be the first step in legalizing all drugs? Who will regulate this "so called" drug, making sure it's "safe" for the user? When did our legislators become experts in the medical field? Why do we even need the FDA?

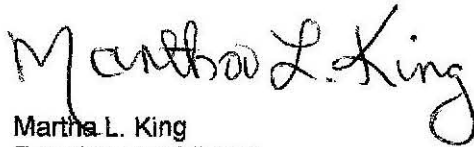
Preventionists have worked diligently for years throughout Pennsylvania educating youth on the dangers of marijuana use. Now we are going to "take it all back" and call it medicine??? I work in hospice and never once did one of our cancer patients have the need for marijuana. Like most other Pennsylvanians, I have had loved ones and family members diagnosed with cancer. I would not approve of any treatment method for them that would put them at higher risk for death and greater medical complications. In addition, using marijuana as a treatment for illness will contribute to the expense of the already struggling health care system in PA.

Those requesting marijuana be made legal so it can be used for critically ill patients is just a ploy to have easy access to a very addictive dangerous drug. Don't be fooled by this; don't bring pot houses to the great state of Pennsylvania. Where do you plan on drawing the line? When do you say enough is enough? When will the real truth behind marijuana use be brought to the

forefront? Please protect my family, my community, and the citizens of Pennsylvania and do not legalize marijuana.

Marijuana use is progressive, destroys bodies and lives, and ruins families. Marijuana is known for its destructive side effects, addictive qualities, and not approved by the FDA for medical use and therefore should not be approved for medical use. Doing so would be a great disservice to those whom live and work in the Commonwealth. Please continue to protect and serve our families, communities, and citizens of Pennsylvania by not approving HB 1393.

Thank you for your time and attention,



Martha L. King
Families of Addiction
Advisory Board Member

Cc: Honorable Matthew Baker
Honorable Tom Corbett, Attorney General
Honorable Edward Rendell
Honorable Arlen Specter
Honorable Robert P. Casey Jr.
Honorable Todd Platts
Honorable Michael L. Waugh
Honorable Will Tallman
Honorable Dan Moul
Honorable Ron Miller