

TESTIMONY OF DON L. REITMEYER, III
BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ON HB 1393 COMPASSIONATE USE ACT OF 2009

Good morning, Chairmen Oliver and Baker, and Members of the Committee. I am Don Reitmeyer from Danville, Montour County. I am submitting this testimony to urge passage of the Compassionate Use Medical Marijuana Act of 2009 by this Committee and the General Assembly.

I am a 42 year old, lifelong resident of Pennsylvania and Honorably Discharged U.S. Marine, married, father of a 4-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter. In January 1993 I re-injured my low back at work and ruptured a disc during therapy, requiring surgery. I suffer from Spinal Stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal) due to scar tissue, Sciatica, and bulging discs in my low back. I have severe pain in my low back, legs, and buttocks. I am permanently Disabled. I am diagnosed as having "Failed Low Back Syndrome".

I have been in constant, chronic pain for the past 16 years; the pain has become progressively worse with each passing year. I have been through the gambit of prescription medications and other treatments for treating chronic pain, to no avail. Currently I am prescribed Oxycontin, 100 mg Twice daily for Pain and Valium, 5 mg 3 times daily for muscle spasms. I also take Amitriptylene 50 mg at bedtime for Depression and Sleep and Ibuprofen 400-1000 mg daily, as needed.

I have been using these Medications for several years. While they do help control my pain, I am *never* pain free. Should I do anything too physical, such as walking, driving or standing too long (20 minutes), or simply getting upset over arbitrary occurrences, my pain escalates to the point that medications have no effect whatsoever. My pain becomes *overwhelming*.

Due to my work injury I live in poverty on workers' compensation which adds to my stress from worrying about finances, and the constant harassment from the Insurance carrier, sending late payments, ignoring Judges' orders, etc. I am forced to lie down with my legs up on pillows waiting for relief that never comes. Normally, several times a month, I find myself unable to walk at all due to a "pinched" nerve.

When I have used Marijuana at these times of uncontrollable pain, I am able to relax, my nausea subsides, allowing me to eat and it takes my mind off my pain thereby lessening the agony I experience. I do not sleep well, nor do I feel rested when I wake up. If I use Marijuana an hour or two before bed, I am able to fall asleep and more importantly, stay asleep! The constant lack of sleep exacerbates my pain and I constantly feel drained of energy, which makes watching my children a burden. Again, Marijuana allows me to get the sleep I desperately need.

I never consume Marijuana when I am looking after my children and they have never been exposed to it, or its smoke. Actually, I use a volcano vaporizer, which produces very little smoke, due to having COPD from cigarette smoking. In short, Chronic pain causes anxiety and depression, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep. The constant, nagging pain causes me to have anger issues and often renders me unfit to be in social settings.

Marijuana allows me to get my mind off my pain, which has a domino effect. I feel less pain, my muscle spasms are relieved somewhat and my prescription medication can work as intended. Otherwise I'm almost bed ridden with uncontrollable pain.

I have grave concerns getting, and using, Marijuana. I know that it is illegal and yet the benefits I get from using it outweigh the legal risk. When you suffer long enough you'll do anything to make the pain stop.

I normally acquire it through adult friends. I get sick if I discontinue my Rx medications. Marijuana is less harmful than alcohol (which I can't drink) and I have no withdrawal symptoms at all. Years ago, from 1860-1937 Marijuana was available as medicine for exactly the kind of ailment(s) for which I use it (Pain, anxiety, and muscle relaxer), and marijuana was sold over the counter at pharmacies. I am very concerned that I don't know anything about where it came from (gangs, organized crime, etc.?) Or, if it was grown/sprayed with harmful chemicals.

Medical studies have shown proof of pain relief due to marijuana's effect on pain receptors in the brain. The Institute of Medicine was asked by the White House Office of National Drug Policy to conduct a review of the scientific evidence to assess the potential health benefits and risks of marijuana and its constituent cannabinoids. That review began in August 1997.

After reviewing a series of trials in 1997, the U.S. Society for Neuroscience concluded that "substances similar to or derived from marijuana ... could benefit the more than 97 million Americans who experience some form of pain each year." And the 1999 study commissioned by the White House and conducted by the Institute of Medicine recognizes the role that cannabis can play in treating chronic pain. "After nausea and vomiting, chronic pain was the condition cited most often to the Institute of Medicine study team as a medicinal use for marijuana."

The study found that "basic biology indicates a role for cannabinoids [a group of compounds found in cannabis] in pain and control of movement, which is consistent with a possible therapeutic role in these areas. The evidence is relatively strong for the treatment of pain and intriguingly, although less well established, for movement disorder."

According to the Report, a number of brain areas that have an established role in sensing and processing pain respond to the analgesic effect of cannabis, such that

cannabinoids have been used successfully to treat cancer pain, which is often resistant to treatment with opiates.

My father died from lung cancer in July 1993. He said the only thing that allowed him to have an appetite was Marijuana. I watched as he wasted away, unable to find marijuana, and he could barely keep down cans of Ensure. I beg you to please pass the Medical Marijuana Legislation before you and show compassion for those of us unfortunates for which medications alone won't work in providing relief. We don't want to get "high", we want a better quality of life.

My testimony is submitted according to the law of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Rules of the House of Representatives. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard.

Respectfully yours,



Don L. Reitmeyer, III
Disabled/USMC Veteran
(570) 437-3806
reitme@verizon.net

Dated: August 11, 2009

cc: Honorable Rep. Robert Belfanti, Jr.
Honorable Sen. John Gordner