

TESTIMONY OF Michael Hendrick
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. My name is Michael Hendrick, and I'm from Temple, PA. I am submitting this testimony to urge passage of the Compassionate Use Act of 2009 (HB 1393) by this Committee and the General Assembly.

First, I would just like to state that, legally, I was found to be completely physically disabled by a federal judge in 2005. Starting from the ground and working up, I have an arthritic condition in my left knee. It is not so much painful as annoying but it can be a distraction. An injury tore my ligaments and cartilage and ripped open the caputular sack which holds all that stuff together. When the surgeon cut open the area to insert a steel pin, which holds it all together now, a piece of my kneecap about the size of a quarter fell out.

Moving up, we come to my rectum - which is no longer there. It was removed with about 25% of my colon in 2002 when I was diagnosed with stage 3-4 colon cancer. The surgeon told me that, since the cancer had eaten a hole through the wall of my colon and had traveled to the fatty tissue between the lymph nodes, I had a 15% chance of living more than two years and a 20% chance of living past five years. I was upset with this and sought a second opinion at Fox Chase Cancer Center and was given the same prognosis.

After surgery on January 2, 2002, I was put on a seven month course of chemotherapy along with 30 radiation treatments. The first week began with radiation and chemo on the same day for five days in a row. The fact that I am alive today is a miracle but I would note that the damage from the treatments seem more devastating than the cancer itself, which I am told was probably growing in me for 15 to 20 years.

Radiation has a number of effects on the body and I imagine a professional could explain them better than I. The drug used for my chemo stays in the system for 10 years, according to product information. It kills all cells which reproduce quickly, including brain cells and digestive enzymes. The reaction of my digestive system to these treatments has left me with post-cancer Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Ulcerative Colitis, constant cramping and discomfort. I take six prescription drugs and also OTC remedies daily for this, and though they have helped make life manageable enough to go out in public without wearing a diaper, I will never get better since my colon/rectum is not something that will grow back.

I go to a pain management specialist who told me that the operation I had was probably done 50 times ever, worldwide. He said that if a med student needed a topic to write a thesis on, I would be the perfect subject because the operation I had has never really been written about. It is the equivalent of having a colonoscopy without a bag. I am lucky I do not have to wear a bag. If the cancer had been present two inches in either direction on my colon, I would be wearing a bag today. Basically, the surgeon removed the cancerous section of colon and my rectum and stretched the existing colon to my anus. Not having a rectum is tough to get used to

in itself. Since all of this surgery took place in my bowels, I am left with hemorrhoids which cannot be removed due their proximity to the sphincter, which is all I have left to control the passage of excrement from my body.

While IBS and UC are usually conditions brought about by stress or mental conditions, in my case they are of physical origin but the fact that I have them causes stress which exacerbates the symptoms. It is a vicious circle.

I have been given marijuana by friends at times during my treatment and since. I can take my full regimen of prescriptions and still be left with cramping, discomfort and nausea, which are relieved by cannabis in less than five minutes. I know a few people who have given me an open invitation to visit them and smoke when I need it. It helps but I have noticed that when they tell me that they may not be able to procure marijuana, I can become stressed and the symptoms flare up. Just the comfort of knowing I can go someplace and get relief is a stress-breaker in itself. The uncertainty of whether I may or may not be able to get relief can increase my symptoms. A legal, safe environment where I could go to purchase my medical marijuana would be a great relief.

Through this, I have noticed that if I do not eat, I have less discomfort. There are times when I am hungry and scoff at the thought of eating because I know what the results will be and how my body will react to the food. That is not healthy. With all I have gone through, good nutrition is an issue. Smoking cannabis makes me want to eat and I really think that had it not been for smoking, I never would have made it this far. I would not want to live in a world with no relief.

Although marijuana is not a cure, it is a giant break from stress and helps me crave nutrition, as well as helping with the attendant anxiety, etc. Of course, not knowing how my stomach will react from day to day is a stressor as well, which has led to treatment for generalized anxiety disorder.

I still have steel staples in my colon. Moving up the body, we get to my eyes. The radiation had such an effect on drying my eyes that I now have silicon implants in my tear ducts to keep the tears from draining when they are on my eye. The moisture helps to keep my eyes a bit more moist but they are in a constant state of dryness and itchiness. Smoking helps me forget about that.

Another concern with my eyes is that I have been under treatment with a glaucoma specialist since 1997 for a condition called pigment dispersion syndrome. The pigment on the back of my irises flakes off and floats in the liquid inside my eyes. These flakes can float to the area where fluids enter and exit the eye, blocking the drain and causing pressure which can build up and lead to glaucoma if unchecked.

Due to another injury, the orbit of my left eye is held in place by three steel plates and a number of screws. I cannot fully close the eye. That in itself is a cause of discomfort and headaches, especially when there are changes in barometric pressure.

When I was a child, I was prone to ear infections and suffered with them for many years. As a result, I have about 50% hearing loss in my right ear, which is mostly scar tissue on the inside. This causes earaches which help touch off headaches that I believe are related to the steel plates. These are also caused by

changes in barometric pressure. So when there is a storm on the way, or a change about to occur in the weather, I know ahead of time because of the discomfort in my knee, ear and sinuses, especially the sinuses around the left eye where the plates are. I take another prescription for this problem.

Again, marijuana does not stop the pain completely, but neither do the pills. It does take my mind off of the discomfort to the point that I can forget I am in pain. In my situation, if I am not in pain in one area, chances are I am still in pain somewhere else. I am in a constant state of pain and cramping. If it were not for the prescriptions that I will be taking for the rest of my life, I would not be able to function. Until I started pain management, I was stuck on the sofa because I was afraid of the consequences of getting up and going out.

I would like to lead a normal life but that is not possible anymore. I have learned to bear what has been dealt to me in life but do not understand why marijuana, something that helps me so much, is unavailable to me legally.

It makes a giant difference and I truly believe I would be dead today if I was not able to smoke and forget the pain and take my focus off all this jumble of maladies. I doubt I would have made it through the chemotherapy and radiation. Given the prognosis and my state of mind, I probably would have killed myself, either through starvation or on purpose because the future looked so dismal. Fortunately, I had friends give me gifts of marijuana throughout the process and I honestly feel it made the difference in my survival.

Please help by voting "YES" on HB 1393. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

Dated: 11/29/2009

Sincerely,



Michael Hendrick
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