

TESTIMONY OF Stephany Bowen
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 Stephany Bowen, I live in Rosedale, PA, and I am a permanently disabled veteran.

I am a 70% service connected disabled from the 6 years I spent in the USMC, I have hypertension, chronic depression, PTSD, and anxiety disorder as well as chronic pain in my knees, back, and hips due to my stint in the marine corps. These issues are what I am service connected for, but I also suffer from Diabetic Neuropathy, as well as fibromyalgia, and I have metal implements in my neck which are not service related, but for which I receive pain medication that the VA provides.

I have always been honest when it comes to me smoking with the VA, and have followed their rules and their doctor's orders, but lately my doctor was changed and my smoking marijuana has become an issue. At an appointment on the 16th of Nov. 2009, I was told by my new doctor that I would have to stop smoking, and must pass a urine test on the 14th of Dec. 2009 or they will stop prescribing my pain medication. My new doctor was not speaking to the issue of whether marijuana was bad for me or that it interfered with my treatment, but to the issue that he and his superiors would get in trouble if someone looked at my files and found that I was using an illegal substance. They could get in hot water over them overlooking it. Even so, I was incredulous at the notion, but it seemed I had no choice.

I have tried to stop smoking cannabis to appease them, but when I stopped, my stomach gets upset and I stop eating because it makes me sick. I don't even smoke that much anyway - about 1/8 oz. per week - but it calms my stomach and returns my appetite so that I can maintain a normal diabetic diet.

I feel like I am being blackmailed by the VA! I have a choice - stop smoking and be sick, not eat properly, suffer from the pain and get my medications (which themselves make me sick); or continue smoking, fail a urine test, and have my pain medication stopped, which will end with me in the hospital. If that's the best choice this country and Commonwealth can provide, it is pathetic!

I served my country and would do it again if asked, but as I see it now my country is stabbing me in the back over a WEED. This is just not right, and since I was told this on the 16th, my state of being has been horrible. I have been eating irregularly, my stomach has been upset to the point that I have to smoke just to eat, I have had no appetite, my pain level has increased dramatically, and my anxiety has made me a basket case.

I don't know where to turn right now. If I go to the VA for help they give me the same party line that it is illegal and that's that. I hope you can give me some respite by supporting and passing HB 1393. I am not an addict or a criminal, and that is how I feel I am being treated. Please pass HB 1393 as soon as humanely possible. It's the right thing to do.

Dated: 11/21/2009

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephany Bowen
5545 Verona Road
Rosedale, PA 15147