

TESTIMONY OF RONALD W. OWEN

TO THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING, PITTSBURGH PA

AUGUST 19, 2010

HOUSE BILL 1393

GOOD AFTERNOON MR CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE. MY NAME IS RONALD OWEN. I AM HERE TODAY AS A LONG-TERM PENNSYLVANIA RESIDENT, A CORPORATE EXECUTIVE, A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER, A TRUSTEE OF A COLLEGE, A BOARD MEMBER OF A BANK, A CO-CHAIR OF A SUB-COMMITTEE WITH THE OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE SERVICES, A MEMBER OF THE PENNSYLVANIA PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL SINCE ITS' INCEPTION IN 2006, A HUSBAND, A FATHER AND A GRANDFATHER.

I AM NOT HERE AS A PAID SPOKEPERSON FOR ANY ORGANIZATION. I AM NOT HERE TODAY TO PRESENT MYSELF AS A MEDICAL EXPERT OR AS SOMEONE WHO HAS SPENT MONTHS AND YEARS FOLLOWING ATTEMPTS BY ORGANIZATIONS OR PAID LOBBYISTS IN A SMALL NUMBER OF STATES TO GET THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF THE LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES INTO LAW.

I AM MOSTLY HERE AS A FATHER. A FATHER WHOSE LIFE WAS CHANGED FOREVER ON NOVEMBER 24, 2003 WHEN MY 23 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER SARAH DIED. SHE DIDN'T DIE A PEACEFUL DEATH. SHE DIED A PAINFUL AND ANGUISHED DEATH AT THE HANDS OF THE WICKED AND TENACIOUS DISEASE OF ADDICTION.

SARAH WAS A LOVING DAUGHTER, GRANDDAUGHTER, SISTER AND THE MOTHER OF A BEAUTIFUL 5-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER, TAYLOR ROSE. SARAH WAS NOT AN ANGRY, MEAN SPIRITED PERSON. EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS CAUGHT IN THE GRIP OF A RELENTLESS ILLNESS, SHE WAS ALWAYS KIND, RESPECTFUL AND SYMPATHETIC TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. SHE ENJOYED LIFE TO ITS FULLEST. SHE DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE THIS ILLNESS. SHE STRUGGLED MIGHTILY TO CONQUER THE DEMONS, BUT THEY WERE VICTORIOUS IN THE END. I AM ONLY ONE VOICE HERE TODAY, BUT I AM REPRESENTING TENS OF THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES WHO WILL NOT GET A VOICE TODAY, BUT WHO CERTAINLY DESERVE TO HAVE THEIR VOICE HEARD AT THE BALLOT BOX ON THIS ISSUE. THIS IMPORTANT, LANDSCAPE CHANGING LEGISLATION, SHOULD NOT, IN MY OPINION, BE DECIDED BY LEGISLATORS AND A GOVERNOR WHO HAS 5 MONTHS LEFT IN HIS TERM. I AM HERE TODAY TO VOICE STRONG OPPOSITION TO HB 1393 - FOR MY DECEASED DAUGHTER WHO'S LIFE WAS TAKEN AWAY, FOR THE THOUSANDS OF

FAMILIES WHO'S LIVES HAVE BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY A DRUG RELATED ILLNESS IN THEIR FAMILIES, AND ON BEHALF OF OUR CHILDREN WHO DO NOT NEED TO GROW UP IN A FUTURE PENNSYLVANIA, IF THIS BILL IS ENACTED, WHERE USING ILLEGAL DRUGS IS CONDONED. I CHALLENGE ANY INTELLIGENT PERSON HERE TODAY TO ARGUE THAT THIS BILL WILL, UNQUESTIONABLY, NOT INCREASE ABUSE IN OUR STATE.

THE FOCUS OF MY COMMENTS TODAY IS NOT TO PRESENT THEORIES OR OPINIONS ABOUT MEDICAL MARIJUANA, BUT TO SIMPLY PRESENT THE FACTS THAT I HAVE GATHERED FROM MY REVIEW FROM VARIOUS SOURCES. LET ME BEGIN:

- 1) THE FEDERAL DRUG ADMINISTRATION (FDA) OPPOSES MEDICAL MARIJUANA. MODERN MEDICINE DOES NOT CONDONE SMOKING MEDICATIONS. OUR COUNTRY FOLLOWS A PROCESS THROUGH THE FDA TO ASSURE MEDICATIONS ARE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE. I READ OF MANY STUDIES THAT CONCLUDED THAT THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT SUBSTANTIATES BENEFITS FROM SMOKING MARIJUANA. MEDICAL MARIJUANA HAS NEVER PASSED SAFETY TESTS BY THE FDA. IN FACT, IN THE EARLY 1990'S, THE FDA ALLOWED A LIMITED NUMBER OF SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENTS TO SMOKE MARIJUANA. THE PROGRAM WAS TERMINATED IN 1992 WHEN NO EVIDENCE WAS DISCOVERED THAT MARIJUANA WAS ASSISTING PATIENTS. IN FACT, THE FDA ISSUED A WARNING THAT IT ACTUALLY COULD BE HARMFUL TO SOME PATIENTS.
- 2) CURRENT FEDERAL LAW CATEGORIZES MARIJUANA, REGARDLESS OF THE REASON FOR ITS USE, AS HAVING HIGH POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE. AS SUCH, FEDERAL LAW DOES NOT ALLOW OR PERMIT THE USE OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA AT THIS TIME. FROM MY REVIEW, PASSAGE OF HB 1393 WOULD LIKELY BE CHALLENGED AS TO ITS LEGALITY ON A FEDERAL LEVEL.
- 3) THE USE, DISTRIBUTION AND TRAFFICKING OF MARIJUANA CONTINUES TO BE ILLEGAL ACCORDING TO FEDERAL LAWS.
- 4) IN A NUMBER OF STATES, WHO HAVE PASSED THE LEGALIZATION OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA WITH REGULATED STRICT STATUTES, THE MARIJUANA LOBBYISTS HAVE WORKED TO LIBERALIZE THE RULES LATER.
- 5) FEW LEGITIMATE MEDICAL GROUPS ARE SUPPORTIVE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF MARIJUANA AS A MEDICINE.
- 6) TETRAHYDROCANNABINOL, THC, IS AVAILABLE AS A MEDICINE IN PURE ORAL PREPARATION. TWO FDA APPROVED PILLS CONTAINING THC ARE: MARINOL – WHICH TREATS NAUSEA AND VOMITING THAT GOES ALONG WITH CERTAIN TREATMENTS AND NABILONE – WHICH ALSO TREATS NAUSEA. THERE ARE MANY OTHER APPROVED DRUGS TO ASSIST CANCER PATIENTS.
- 7) OPEN ACCEPTANCE OF MARIJUANA FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES INTERFERES WITH ENFORCING DRUG SCREENING. WILL THE USE OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA ALLOW

WORKERS TO COME TO WORK 'HIGH?' WILL EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY INCREASE OR DECREASE WITH THIS CONDITION?

- 8) IT HAS PROVEN TO BE DIFFICULT AND EXPENSIVE TO REGULATE IN THE OTHER MEDICAL MARIJUANA STATES AND THE AMOUNT OF ADDITIONAL COSTS DUE TO FRAUD, CRIME AND OTHER COSTS WILL BE EXHORIBANT. LET ME RELATE ONE SMALL INCIDENT THAT I AM AWARE OF. SOME OF YOU MIGHT REMEMEBER THIS INCIDENT. IT OCCURRED IN FEBRUARY 2010 – A FLIGHT FROM PHILADELPHIA TO LOS ANGELES NEEDED TO BE DIVERTED FOR AN EMERGENCY LANDING IN PGH BECAUSE A PASSENGER ON BOARD THE AIRPLANE BEGAN SCREAMING, DROPPED HIS PANTS AND ATTACKED THE AIRLINE CREW. HE WAS REMOVED FROM THE PLANE AND ARRESTED. TRAVEL PLANS OF THE 100 PASSENGERS ON BOARD WERE INTERRUPTED BECAUSE OF THIS INCIDENT. THE ALLEGED REASON FOR THIS INCIDENT? THIS PERSON CONSUMED TWO MARIJUANA COOKIES WHICH WAS DOUBLE HIS NORMAL DOSE. UNNECESSARY EXPENSES FOR VARIOUS GROUPS WERE INCURRED AS A RESULT OF THIS ONE INCIDENT. IS THIS AN ISOLATED INCIDENT? WHO COULD NOT EXPECT MANY MORE OF THESE TYPES OF OCCURENCES IF MARIJUANA USAGE FOR MEDICAL REASONS IS ALLOWED?

I DID NOT HAVE THE LUXURY, BECAUSE OF THE SHORT NOTICE OF THIS HEARING, TO BECOME AWARE OR TO STUDY WHO ELSE WOULD BE SPEAKING BEFORE YOU TODAY, MR. CHAIRMAN. I ASSUME THAT YOU WILL PROBABLY NOT HEAR TODAY FROM ONE VERY IMPORTANT GROUP, WHO ARE INVOLVED EVERY DAY IN HELPING PARENTS FORMULATE FUTURE OPINIONS - OUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS. THIS INFLUENTIAL GROUP TO OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN NEED TO BE HEARD FROM AS TO HOW THEY WOULD INSTRUCT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE DANGERS OF MARIJUANA USE BUT AT THE SAME TIME EXPLAIN TO THEM THAT, ALTHOUGH ILLEGAL, MARIJUANA COULD BE USED IN OUR STATE.

HOW MANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS HAVE YOU HEARD FROM THAT SUPPORT THIS HOUSE BILL?

DO YOU HAVE A STABLE OF PA JUDGES WHO BELIEVE THIS HOUSE BILL IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF PENNSYLVANIA?

MY WIFE AND I BELONG TO A FRATERNITY OF PARENTS, WHO TRAGICALLY HAVE LOST A CHILD AS A RESULT OF A DRUG PROBLEM. YOU WILL PROBABLY HEAR TODAY FROM SOMEONE THAT THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC PROOF TO SUBSTANIATE A CLAIM THAT MARIJUANA IS A HIGHWAY TO OTHER DRUGS. I CAN TELL YOU THAT MY DAUGHTER HAD EXPOSURE TO MARIJUANA DURING HER HIGH SCHOOL YEARS. THIS EXPOSURE LED HER TO OTHER RECREATIONAL DRUGS. HAS ANY SUPPORTER OF THIS HOUSE BILL, THAT IS HERE TODAY OR THAT YOU HAVE HEARD FROM IN OTHER HEARINGS, HAD A DEATH

IN THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILY DUE TO DRUG ADDICTION? MY BELIEF IS THAT IF THEY DID, THEY WOULD NOT BE SUPPORTING THIS DANGEROUS PIECE OF LEGISLATION. MR. CHAIRMAN, I URGE YOU NOT TO ATTEMPT TO LEGISLATE MEDICAL MARIJUANA FOR PENNSYLVANIA. PLEASE PROTECT OUR FAMILIES, OUR YOUTH, OUR COMMUNITIES AND CITIZENS OF PENNSYLVANIA FROM THIS DANGEROUS CHANGE. PENNSYLVANIA IS A LEADER IN MANY WAYS TO AMERICA. DO NOT ALLOW US TO BECOME THE CALIFORNIA OF THE EAST. PLEASE DO NOT SUPPORT THIS BILL....THANK YOU