

Good Afternoon, My name is Sgt Matthew Wright and I am here to share with you my recent experience in the US Army. When I joined the army nearly 6 years ago it was with the ideal to support my government in its efforts of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I missed my own high school graduation commencement because I volunteered for deployment to the Middle East.

After spending 15 months guarding checkpoints and participating in various and often dangerous military detail; I finally returned home. It was from that time until very recently that I found it difficult to eat or sleep. I even encountered difficulty in sitting in traffic. According to the army medical staff, these are all symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, a condition very common among our military service personnel who have served in capacities similar to my own. The army provided me with medications that did nothing to alleviate my symptoms and compounded the problem with side-effects of upset stomach and severe headaches.

For over 3 years I struggled with ongoing weight-loss and chronic sleeplessness. Tired and frustrated, I began my own research into homeopathic and other all natural treatments. Fortunately, I met an expert herbalist who was quite familiar with my specific symptoms of PTSD. He explained to me that an active component of the naturally grown marijuana plant is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol - THC that could safely offer me relief where prescription pills had failed. I was surprised and more than a bit skeptical of his advice to use cannabis as a valid treatment of my symptoms.

I've always been a respectable and upstanding citizen; a proud and responsible American soldier so it was difficult for me to even consider the use of marijuana. ...until I learned that the VA accepts medical marijuana as a treatment option in states that have legalized medicinal marijuana. Again: the VA accepts medical marijuana as a treatment option in states that have legalized medicinal marijuana!

That fact alone prompted me to follow the advice of the Herbalist. I realized that I am no less important as a VA patient just because I live in Pennsylvania and not in New Jersey ; my symptoms are just as treatable in Pennsylvania as they would be if I lived in Maine or California; The VA supports this treatment for soldiers like me in these states and they should be able to include Pennsylvania soldiers who are diagnosed with PTSD

Yes, I followed the advice of a qualified herbalist - the same advice offered by MD's in other states...and now I have these results to share: My PTSD symptoms have subsided; I'm able to maintain a healthy weight. What's more: I have continued with my education, worked steadily, volunteered as an assistant to the local Armed Forces recruitment center and was even promoted to Sergeant. Clearly, marijuana has had no negative effects on my work performance.

But these positive results have come with a great penalty. Sadly, I come to you today to inform you that the so-called War on Drugs has struck me hard. My career with the US Army has come to an end. I been formally asked to accept a general discharge. I will not be able to volunteer for re-deployment as planned. I've now been labeled as a drug user by the US Army. This harsh label will only succeed to tarnish my image, damage my future, and strip me of the veterans benefits I've earned as a defender of my country and my fellow citizens.

Unfortunately my story is not so unique. Here in Pennsylvania many soldiers such as myself are given only 2 options: suffer and struggle without treatment - or leave the ranks of our proud military, with nothing to show for our bravery. Please allow me to share the stories of a couple of other veterans:

Rodney Stahl, like so many other men and women, joined the Army after the tragedy of 9/11. He was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, in 2004.

“During my deployment I saw many tragedies of war, many things I can’t and won’t be able to forget the rest of my life. When I returned to the states I was grateful to be alive and ready to be home. Several months after returning from Iraq I started to change. I started having flashbacks, nightmares, depression and severe anxiety and anxiety attacks. I tried to deal with it myself but that wasn’t working. I decided to go to the VA and get checked out. After many evaluations I was diagnosed with PTSD and I was prescribed multiple medications.

Unfortunately the medications take weeks to even start doing anything because they have to build up in your system over time. After the medications where supposed to be helping I really wasn’t getting any from them. I went back to the doctors which in return they up the milligrams of my medications. These medications have many side affects physically and emotionally. To name one side affect, sexual dysfunction. I’m a young married guy and that side affect is extremely major to me.

After weeks of no progress and still feeling down I started researching the web to find out how other veterans deal and cope with their PTSD. It didn’t take long till I stumbled upon medical marijuana. I gave it some thought and researched it even more. Veteran after veteran used medical marijuana for their PTSD. There is even a website you can join [www.veteransformedicalmarijuana.org](http://www.veteransformedicalmarijuana.org). Medical marijuana has no major side affects and works wonders. I’m now in college for Business Administration, and looking forward to my wife’s and my future and I’m grateful to be living a happy life. Please support HB 1393! There are so many people that are touched by this bill and the passing of it is crucial to get the help patients need. “

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Frank Barbay joined the US Navy on September 15, 1988. He was stationed on an aircraft carrier and later served as a recruiter. According to his written testimony submitted for this hearing:

“I started having problems with my back in Jan. 1995 and by May 1995 I had my first back surgery to de-bulk and de-tether a Lipomo at the L-4, L-5 region. The Navy doctors prescribed MS Contin (oral morphine) for pain. I was still in constant pain because I took the minimum I could stand to ease the side affects. Constipation, no appetite, feeling looped out, and no drive are just some of the negative side affects I suffered.

Over the subsequent years I had two more surgeries hoping to get some relief. I also did many alternative methods (acupuncture, physical therapy, creams etc) to relieve the pain. The Navy and then the VA just kept handing me more and more MS contin. In march of 2004 I could not work anymore and was placed on disability. In 2008 the VA switched me to Methadone and Vicodin to save them money. These drugs make it easy to give up and live looped out. That is not who I am and I must fight it every day to get a little relief with a lot of side affects.”

The VA now permits cannabis use in states with a medicinal marijuana program but not in PA. If I use it here I could lose my benefits. I understand the chance that some people will abuse this new bill. I also understand that HB1393 will help a lot of people who are suffering everyday.”

In closing I’d like you to think of the words of former President Jimmy Carter. “Penalties against drug use should not be more damaging than the use of the drug itself.”