

**Testimony of James Walsh, Fraternal Order of Police, PA State Lodge
Before Pennsylvania House Health and Judiciary Committees
April 8, 2015 – Medical Cannabis and Law Enforcement**

Good morning. My name is James Walsh. I am a 30-year veteran of local, county and federal law enforcement. I was privileged to serve as a municipal police officer, county detective in York County, and then as a Special Agent for the U.S. Department of State, from which position I retired in December, 2001. I am also privileged to serve on the Legislative Committee for the Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge, which represents over 40,000 law enforcement professionals throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I would like to extend my thanks to Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs, and the other Committee members for inviting the PA FOP to participate in today's joint hearing, and for your work on matters of concern to Pennsylvania's Police Officers.

I appear before the Joint Committee today to state the PA FOP's position on the use of medical cannabis in Pennsylvania. While the FOP supports the use of safe and effective medication in order to alleviate pain and cure disease, we recommend caution on this issue, and we ask that the General Assembly take a deliberate approach to considering a highly-regulated system for the distribution and use of medical cannabis.

In theory, and only in theory, it is difficult to oppose the physician-supervised use of any medication to treat those in need. In practice, however, especially on the issue of medical cannabis, it is not so difficult to be skeptical, especially for police officers.

One reason for skepticism is federal law. I remind the Committee members that under federal law marijuana is categorized as a Schedule I drug, meaning that it has "no current medical use in treatment in the United States." We are very concerned about conflicts between state and federal law in which a drug deemed to have "no current medical use" by the federal government is classified by Pennsylvania as a drug that is acceptable for medical use. For us, this means that the best solution is to address this issue at a federal, not state, level.

In the event, however, that there is a clear consensus in the medical community on the necessity for medical cannabis, and that there exists the political will to move forward with such treatments in Pennsylvania, the PA FOP does not oppose the exploration of a highly-regulated system of medical cannabis prescription for Pennsylvania.

Any such system would need to be highly regulated, and it would need to satisfy the following:

- * Enabling legislation must be specific as to the medical conditions for which medical cannabis treatment is permissible.
- * If "off label" use is to be allowed its approval should not be limited to the discretion of one doctor, but instead be subject to review and approval by an appropriate board or committee.
- * Administration of medical cannabis should be limited to medically-approved methods of drug administration only, i.e., smoking prohibited.

- * Any medical cannabis system should be subject to strict inventory and quality controls, from grower to end user.

In other words, Pennsylvania's medical cannabis system should be the most strict in the nation, in order to be very clear that the law is not a subterfuge for recreational use. If the General Assembly wishes to consider recreational use of marijuana in Pennsylvania, then that should be done in an open and honest fashion.

As law enforcement officers, the PA FOP's members spend significant time and effort dealing with Pennsylvania's sick and injured. We are often the first to arrive to those calls for assistance. From our perspective, then, we should not be arresting sick people for taking medicine that they need. Yet we also should not unnecessarily expand access to what we all know is a very popular, dangerous and illegal drug. As I stated earlier, we counsel caution on this controversial issue and look forward to a full and fair review of the costs and benefits of a medical cannabis system in Pennsylvania.

In closing, let me again thank the Committee members for your continued support of Pennsylvania's Law Enforcement Officers. We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on this and other issues in order to provide for safer communities and safer citizens throughout our Commonwealth. I would be happy to answer any questions on my testimony. Thank you.