



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health.

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Supportive testimony for HB 6715: An Act Concerning Palliative Marijuana to the Judiciary Committee

My name is Dawn Fuller-Ball, President of A Better Way Foundation and I was a caretaker for 5 years to Michael, who has renal failure. Renal failure refers to the loss of at least 90% kidney function and required Michael to have dialysis treatment 4 hours per day, 3 days per week. Dialysis is not a cure, rather a life-sustaining treatment. There is only one way someone with renal failure can live without dialysis – a successful kidney transplant. Dialysis replicates the kidney's function by cleaning the blood and removing fluid from the body. As a result, Michael, like most renal patients, experienced migraines, cramping (they say it's worse than labor), fatigue, loss of appetite, and nausea. In order to alleviate some of the symptoms of the life-sustaining dialysis, Michael began smoking marijuana. Michael is one of the few people I've ever met that tells his doctor everything. He told his doctor he was smoking marijuana, which helped alleviate most of the symptoms. His doctor told him he didn't see any harm in using the marijuana, but made it clear that he could neither prescribe the marijuana nor officially condone the use of marijuana or risk losing his license.

Michael, like most Black men, was stopped by police a number of times for driving while Black "DWB". Inevitably, on some of those occasions he was either in possession of marijuana and/or marijuana paraphernalia. But as soon as he showed the police the site where he was hooked up to the dialysis machines, so they would not rupture his shunt (plastic tube placed intravenously for easier access to vein for dialysis) while handcuffing him, he was released on the spot. The police did not want the hassle of special handling then arranging for his life saving dialysis treatment just for a small amount of marijuana. Michael was one of the lucky ones in that respect.

The irony of Michael's predicament is while public safety was the rationale for detaining him the police department's unwillingness to provide for Michael's personal safety was the only thing that helped him avoid a drug charge. I and Michael's story is not unique. That's why A Better Way Foundation and I as a resident are supporting HB 6715: AN Act Concerning Palliative Marijuana.

This bill does two important things: It offers some protection for patients and caregivers especially those who resident in urban areas of CT; and it enables a judge to distinguish between a recreational user and a patient/caregiver in court.

There will be testimony for both pros and cons of the medical use of marijuana. I hope you will realize that the people that need this bill the most are the people of color who live in the urban areas who are either patients or caregivers. Those are the people most likely to be stopped and searched and found with the marijuana substance or the paraphernalia that sick people need. Don't deny them the ability to alleviate symptoms that affect a patient's quality of life.

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