

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee on House Bill 6715: An Act
Concerning the Palliative Use of Marijuana**

By Roger C. Vann, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut

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Good Afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Roger Vann, Executive Director of the ACLU of Connecticut, and I am before you today to express our **support for House Bill 6715: An Act Concerning the Palliative Use of Marijuana**. This bill mirrors statutes that have been enacted in the past few years in eleven other states including Rhode Island most recently in 2006.

The bill is narrowly and specifically drawn. It provides immunity from criminal liability under state law to patients with terminal or certain debilitating illnesses who, with the consent of a treating physician, have small amounts of marijuana in their possession. The bill also protects from liability physicians who advise their patients of the benefits and risks of medical marijuana use.

Numerous safeguards are in place to prevent misuse of this protection. Driving under the influence of marijuana is not protected. Public consumption is not permitted. Those who use fraud to take advantage of this process face criminal penalties. No physician is required to authorize the use of medical marijuana. Health insurance providers aren't required to pay for it. Employers aren't required to accommodate marijuana use at work.

The therapeutic benefits of medical marijuana for certain illnesses have been widely recognized. In recent years, it has been endorsed by such groups as the American Public Health Association, the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the New England Journal of Medicine, The National Association of Attorneys General, the American Bar Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Lymphoma Foundation of America.

The medical efficacy of marijuana has been documented in numerous research studies conducted both in the United States and around the world. Marijuana is therapeutic in the treatment of a number of serious ailments, including stimulating appetite in AIDS patients, reducing nausea caused by chemotherapy and reducing intraocular pressure in people with glaucoma. While a synthetic capsule is available by prescription, it is not as effective as smoked marijuana for many patients, and actually produces more psychoactive side effects than smoked marijuana.

Public opinion polls show that the vast majority of the public supports the medical use of marijuana. A 2004 UCONN poll found that 83% of Connecticut residents think adults should be allowed to use marijuana for medical purposes if a doctor prescribes it.

The 2005 research survey conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that 72% of people 45 years of age and older agree that adults should be allowed to legally use marijuana for medical purposes if a physician recommends it. A 2002 *Time Magazine* poll found 80% of U.S. citizens support the legalization of medical marijuana. In fact, most of the states that have adopted medical marijuana laws have done so through voter initiative. The public knows that this is a matter of compassion and common sense.

The ACLU of Connecticut agrees with the overwhelming majority of Connecticut and American citizens and we urge the General Assembly to pass House Bill 6715.