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My name is Dana Simmons, I am 23 years old, and a resident of Waterbury, CT. Since 1997, I have been diagnosed with a rare, chronic, disorder called Cyclic Vomiting Syndrome and abdominal migraine, which is characterized by prolonged episodes of uncontrollable vomiting and retching, relentless nausea and excruciating abdominal pain. Episodes usually last for days and weeks at a time, and the frequency of my episodes can occur as often as every day. Because of the havoc this illness has caused on my body, I have serious vitamin deficiencies and have developed other problems, such as gastric paresis, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and osteopenia. I also had pancreatitis and ulcers in the past, and had to get my gallbladder removed in May 2003.

Not only has this illness been so physically grueling on my body, but also it has been mentally grueling. Because my illness is rare, often times, most doctors believe that it is "all in my head" and have failed to treat me like a physically sick patient that I am, but as psychotic patient in need of attention. For example, when I go to the emergency room, the doctors drug me up to mask the pain, leaving me even more vulnerable and incoherent than when I entered. I try to tell the doctors what is bothering me, but they do not listen. They seem not to care. They disregard my vomiting and my intense pain and suffering many times while I curled up in the fetal position in the Emergency Room because they label me as drug seeking. My illness lands me in the hospital twice a month for dehydration, pain and nausea control. Last year, I went to the hospital emergency room over 30 times and was admitted two times.

Each time, I was administered Morphine, Ativan, Phenergan or Compazine intravenously, but after years of this routine, my tolerance for these medications has skyrocketed. I also have no more veins left from the constant use of them. Battles wounds of my illness. Also, the side effects of these drugs are horrible. I feel worse after leaving the hospital because they sedate me and rush me home still sick. I have many allergies to medications, such as pain killers like percocet and dilaudid, so morphine is the only pain killer that is given to me. Unfortunately, I have no relief from suppositories or pill versions of these medications because when I am in an active episode, I am vomiting every 10-15 minutes making impossible to keep any medication down.

Also, even though the medication relieved my symptoms in the ER, often times, it was only for a few hours, so I often relapsed, thus requiring more narcotics in my system. This lifestyle was unmanageable and depressing. It was a vicious cycle. I was sick every two weeks for days at a time and went to the hospital almost every episode I had. I missed more than half my classes and spent most days suffering in bed. In addition, my gastric paresis inhibits my appetite, and I often go days without eating, and because I am allergic to Reglan, a medication to promote motility, and Propulsid has been recalled, some doctors just tell me I have no choice but to deal with the symptoms, but I refuse to live my life suffering.

About 5 years ago, two professors at my college talked to me about smoking marijuana to help alleviate my symptoms, but I never took their advice until desperation kicked in, when my health was really deteriorating. I was sick every day and lost 25 pounds in two weeks from not keeping any food down. Part of the reason why I never took their advice until recently was because I grew up in the Bronx surrounded by the drugs, and slogans telling me to *Say No to Drugs* so the idea of smoking marijuana had a negative connotation to me and even today, I still feel ashamed for smoking marijuana. The medicinal benefits of this medication are real, and that stigma should not be put onto seriously sick people desperate to escape their eternal suffering.

Until I researched the pros and cons of marijuana, I realized that the positives of the drug far outweighed the negatives especially since I was becoming tolerant of the morphine and ativan, so I started smoking marijuana, which is supported by my doctor. He has since prescribed me marinol, the synthetic version of THC. However, dosing of this medication is harder and the marinol usually leaves me more euphoric and disoriented than marijuana. Dosing with smoking it is much more controlled, so I only smoke to feel better and not to feel out of it like the marinol makes me feel.

If this drug were legal, I wouldn't have to worry about trying to find marijuana when I'm in sick and in need, or worry about it being laced with other substances, or getting arrested for possession. The fact that this drug is illegal adds difficulty in my trying to make myself feel better. That is all I want to feel better. Now that I smoke it medicinally, my life has improved. I still get sick quite frequently, but my suffering has decreased because of the marijuana. I physically and mentally feel a lot better since I don't get sick as much and my symptoms are controlled because of the anti-emetic and analgesic properties of marijuana, as well as the stimulating effects on your appetite. It is as if I am finally clawing my way out from the dark tunnel into the light. In closing, it is my hope that you will see consider the benefits of marijuana, and how it will improve my life and the lives of many suffering and ailing Connecticut residents. Thank you very much for your time and kind consideration.