

**Testimony to Judiciary Committee, State of CT  
Concerning House Bill 6715**

**Submitted by: Timothy Black, Ph.D.**

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Good afternoon. My name is Tim Black. I am a sociology professor and director of the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford.

A little more than a year ago I lost a dear friend to brain cancer – he was diagnosed in February, 2005 and dead by the end of November. During that time, John (Fred) Pfeil was subject to a gamut of medical treatments, including radiation, chemotherapy, and a changing combination of drugs. As Fred's next door neighbor, I spent much of 2005 on his front porch, watching helplessly as the treatments transformed his body and depressed his psyche, and as the tumors marched on undeterred in his brain. Fred suffered immensely during this time from nausea, loss of appetite, disorientation, physical pain, and depression, and those of us who loved him suffered as well as his condition deteriorated.

In response I did something I had never done before – what some may call a breach of research ethics. I had spent over ten years in a city located outside of Connecticut studying the underground drug economy and its effects on an urban community. I had never engaged in any illicit drug use with any of the men I studied, but nonetheless called one of the men who was part of the study and arranged to purchase a sizable bag of marijuana for my friend Fred. I had not asked Fred beforehand, because I did not want him to refuse my gesture in an effort to protect me from engaging in an unlawful act or in a breach of research ethics. I simply gave it to him and left it up to him whether he used it or not. To my surprise, I found that I was not the only one – others were doing the same in order to comfort our suffering friend. And Fred had many

friends. He was an internationally renowned professor of English at Trinity College, an author and teacher widely loved and admired by students and colleagues.

Fred told me that he smoked the marijuana regularly, at least every other day, and that it provided much needed relief. It helped him to sleep, stimulated his appetite, eased his depression, and decreased his nausea. I was pleased that I could do something for Fred in his greatest moment of despair and vulnerability. Frankly, I would've done just about anything and, despite the illegality of the act, would do it again in a heartbeat.

Fred's experience of using marijuana to relieve the symptoms of his disease and his treatment is consistent with what we have learned in the research literature. Marijuana is a natural drug with important medicinal properties. This bill would allow for it to be used under the medical care of a doctor, would control for the amount of the drug that a patient may have at any given time, and would provide a means to safely dispense of the drug upon the death of the individual.

There are many individuals suffering from similar physical maladies as Fred, who may currently refuse to use the drug, despite its medicinal potential, simply because it is illegal. Passing this bill would allow them to do so without fear of sanctions and without having to wrestle with their own consciences. Moreover, truth be told, I never felt at much risk engaging in the illegal act I committed for my friend. I derive privileges from being a white professional and living in a professional community, and was therefore not looking over my shoulder fearful that the police might intervene. But the same may not be true in racial minority and working-class communities, where drug enforcement practices are more vigilant. We need to assure all members of our state that they and their loved ones will be safe in using marijuana for medicinal purposes.

Let me end by saying that I have a photograph of Fred that sits on my desk at work, from which I derive daily inspiration. Fred taught me the importance of living each day with moral courage towards the objective of making the world a better place. I am asking members of the state legislature to do the same – to assume the principled position that the ultimate standard by which to judge our behavior is whether we make the world a better place for human joy and human suffering. Thank you.