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WRITTEN TESTIMONY
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing – March 14, 2011

IN SUPPORT OF:

- **S.B. No. 1015** AN ACT CONCERNING THE PALLIATIVE USE OF MARIJUANA
- **H.B. No. 6566 (RAISED)** AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMPASSIONATE USE OF MARIJUANA
- **S.B. No. 1014** AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR CERTAIN NONVIOLENT DRUG OFFENSES
- **S.B. No. 953 (RAISED)** AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT DRUG POSSESSION OFFENSES
- **H.B. No. 6391** AN ACT CONCERNING PENALTIES FOR CERTAIN DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OFFENSES, OFFENDER RISK REDUCTION EARNED CREDITS AND HOME CONFINEMENT FOR CERTAIN NONVIOLENT DRUG OFFENDERS

Dear Representative Fox, Senator Coleman and the Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am a long-time citizen of Connecticut and am writing to support the legislation for medical use of marijuana and the decriminalization of marijuana. In addition, I respectfully request that an amendment be added to the medical marijuana bills that specifically articulates Crohn's Disease as a qualifying condition.

S.B. No. 1015 and H.B. No. 6566:

I have family members who suffer terribly from Crohn's Disease. The pain and symptoms of Crohn's Disease can be extreme, and often persist without relief when treated with traditional medications available today. Medicinal marijuana represents a viable means of alleviating the pain and symptoms and providing sufferers with a quality of life they could not have otherwise. The following supports medicinal marijuana for Crohn's Disease:

- ❖ **Crohn's Disease:** Debilitating and chronic autoimmune disease that causes serious inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract (anywhere from mouth to anus) – inflammatory bowel disease
 - Symptoms: abdominal pain and cramping, fever, nausea, urgent diarrhea, gastrointestinal/rectal bleeding, vomiting, weight loss, fatigue, anemia. Complications: skin rashes, arthritis/joint pain, inflammation of the eye. Flare-ups often require hospitalization in order to get the disease under control.
 - There is **no** drug or surgical cure.
 - Treatments control symptoms, maintain remission, prevent relapse – many have dangerous side effects.
- ❖ **Medicinal marijuana:** Crohn's Disease is a qualifying condition for medical marijuana (is specifically articulated in laws of most of the 15 states, DC, Canada where it is approved for use) (and other countries).
- ❖ **Studies support that marijuana/cannabis can be effective in relieving almost all of the debilitating symptoms of Crohn's Disease** – often leading to fewer stools per day and fewer flare-ups of less severity.
 - **Reduces pain** – cannabis is an analgesic
 - Active substances in marijuana have a relaxing effect on the smooth muscles in the intestines which cause cramping and pain. It interacts with the endogenous cannabinoid receptors in the digestive tract, which can result in calming spasms, assuaging pain, and improving motility.
 - **Reduces nausea and vomiting** – cannabis is an anti-emetic.
 - **Reduces inflammation** – cannabis has been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties.
 - **Suppresses/modulates immune system response** – Patients with Crohn's have an overactive immune system which causes them to get sick. Cannabis can help suppress/modulate the immune system so it will not send out signals to attack the large/small intestines.
 - **Increases appetite, helps weight gain.**

❖ **Selected Studies/Articles:**

- Medical marijuana is a powerful **anti-inflammatory** that “represents a **promising therapeutic target** for the treatment of intestinal disease conditions characterized by excessive inflammatory responses.”
 - *“The Endogenous Cannabinoid System Protects Against Colonic Inflammation”*, Journal of Clinical Investigation 2004; *Cannabinoids and the digestive tract*, Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology 2005; *The endocannabinoid system in the physiology and pathophysiology of the gastrointestinal tract*, Journal of Molecular Medicine 2005
- Crohn’s patients report **significant improvements in Crohn’s symptoms** from cannabis.
 - *Cannabis Alleviates Symptoms of Crohn’s Disease, O’Shaughnessy’s Scientific Journal 2005*
- In the human colon marijuana plant compounds (cannabinoids) **promote (epithelial) wound healing**, help restore gut “barrier integrity” lost with Crohn’s Disease.
 - “CB1 receptors are expressed in normal human colon and colonic epithelium is responsive biochemically and functionally to cannabinoids. Increased epithelial CB2-receptor expression in human inflammatory bowel disease tissue implies an immunomodulatory role that may impact on mucosal immunity.”
 - *Differential Expression of Cannabinoid Receptors in the Human Colon:cannabinoids promote epithelial wound healing. Gastroenterology August 2005; BBC News 7/30/105*
- Marijuana’s THC **reduces stomach cramping**.
 - “THC may relax the colon and reduce stomach cramping after eating, according to a Mayo Clinic study presented at the 71st Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Gastroenterology.”
 - *American College of Gastroenterology press release 10/23/06*
- Chemicals found in cannabis could prove an **effective treatment** for ... Crohn’s Disease. ...two compounds found in the cannabis plant ... interact with the body’s system that controls gut function.
 - *Cannabis Hope for Inflammatory Bowel Disease, British Pharmacological Society, science Daily, 12/21/09*
- *Candians Living with Crohn’s Disease Benefit from Using Medical Marijuana*, Ezine article 5/26/10
- *“Marijuana has been found to be helpful in alleviating some of the inflammation, but also by slowing the peristaltic contractions to help calm and slow down the gastrointestinal system. They can have fewer bowel movements, better formed stools, less abdominal pain and need to use less conventional medicines.”*
 - *The Merits of Medical Marijuana, MSN Health 11/6/10*

S.B. No. 1014, S.B. No. 953 and H.B. No. 6391:

I strongly support the decriminalization of marijuana. Marijuana users are not violent criminals and do not pose a threat to the citizens of Connecticut. Individuals who possess minor amounts of marijuana and related paraphernalia should NOT be subject to convictions and jail time ... these infractions should be treated as civil offenses. The criminal penalty for personal marijuana unfairly imposes a significant and permanent impact that jeopardizes the individual’s ability to have a productive life: students desperate for a college education are unable to receive federal financial aid to go to school and many are discriminated against in obtaining jobs. These individuals are forever handicapped in achieving their potential and contributing to society. Our criminal justice system should focus on violent criminals who threaten the citizens of our state.

Decriminalization laws are critical to enforce consistency and fairness. The current laws and practices in dealing with marijuana arrests in Connecticut are both inconsistent with our neighboring states and in great disparity across the state depending on where the arrest takes place. In Connecticut, the same charges can result in everything from treatment and no convictions, diversionary programs that result in expunged records, convictions, fines and/or jail. In addition, ALL individuals diagnosed as drug dependent (with the disease of addiction) should be treated consistent with the practices in Connecticut’s drug courts that recognize the urgent need for treatment, not punishment.

Thank you for your serious consideration and support of these important bills.

Leslie Prager