

My name is Cody Roberge, and I am here to testify for SB 1117. I am a junior undergraduate at the University of Connecticut, studying Ecology and Evolutionary biology, and I was diagnosed with stage IV cancer in January of 2011. During my treatment I was subjected to a total of 10 spinal taps so that chemotherapy could be injected into the fluid of my central nervous system to prevent my cancer from spreading to my brain. These treatments saved my life, and it has been a year and half since my last chemotherapy dose with no signs of my cancer returning. Unfortunately, the spinal taps caused scar tissue to build up which can sometimes push on my nerves and cause debilitating pain.

When this problem first arose, my oncologist prescribed me hydrocodone and acetaminophen to treat the pain. This medication did help, but I was concerned about the potential liver damage from the acetaminophen as well as the addiction risk for opiate pain killers. I was later switched to oxycodone which, while safer for my liver, still has high potential for dependency. Another concern with both of these medications was that they are strong narcotics, and the psychoactive effects make it difficult to concentrate on school work. This put me in a difficult situation, because I had to weigh the potential health risks against the fact that when left untreated, my back pain is almost too severe for me to walk.

Fortunately, I discovered that cannabis can more effectively treat my pain with fewer negative side effects. When taking opiates, my pain would come in bursts where I would have to medicate up to three times a day for as long as a week before the pain would subside for a while. However, when I treat my pain with cannabis, the relief lasts for several days after only smoking or vaporizing once. This means that I can be free of pain, and capable of focusing in class at the same time, which is essential to my life as a student.

Although it is not part of the proposed bill, I think it would also be important to consider changing the state's medical marijuana policy to protect the rights of patients who live on college campuses. Current law makes it extremely difficult for students who require medical cannabis to have a safe place to take their medication.