Gaetano, Carolyn

From: W. A. Petit, Jr. <docpetit@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 24, 2015 1:57 PM
To: GAETestimony
Subject: HB 5174
Attachments: Michaela's 4 O'Clocks Testimony 2015 rev.doc

Here is my testimony on HB 5174. I am Chairman of the CT State Medical Society's State Council and must attend/preside over a re-scheduled state-wide Council meeting on Wednesday the 25th from approximately 1 PM until 7 PM and thus cannot physically attend the hearing.

Sincerely,

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William A. Petit, Jr. MD

Burlington, CT

February 23, 2015

HB 5174

To Co-Chairmen Representative Ed Jutila and Senator Steve Cassano, Vice-Chairman Representative David Alexander, and the rest of the Government Administration and Elections Committee thank you for allowing this testimony.

This all began when Representative Al Adinolfi, with the urging of volunteers from the Michaela's Garden Project, a working committee of the Petit Family Foundation submitted HB 5174; a bill asking approval to create Michaela's 4 O'Clocks as the Childrens' State Flower.

Naming 4 O'Clocks as the Children's State Flower would honor my late daughter Michaela Rose Petit who was brutally murdered in 2007 along with her sister, Hayley Elizabeth Petit and her mother, Jennifer Hawke-Petit when our home was invaded by two recent paroled, recurrent felons.

I began planting 4 O'Clocks in my gardens in Cheshire, CT and was joined by my younger daughter Michaela. She helped plant them and often talked of making the soil "cozy" for the seeds and the plants to come. She enjoyed their flowering and helped me collect seeds at the end of each season so we could re-plant them again the following spring.

My late brother-in-law Dennis Chapman helped me rescue the surviving 4 O'Clocks from our property in Cheshire the late summer of 2007 after our house was burned. The plants were doing very poorly as it was a very hot stretch that summer. We were, however, able to nurse them back to health and again collect seeds. We did so over the next few years and Dennis had the idea to grow and collect the seeds to keep the memory of Michaela alive. Thus, the Michaela's Garden Program began.

Our state motto is: "He who transplants sustains," and 4 O'Clocks can be grown from seeds *or* the tuber can be dug up, stored and replanted the next season. It provides beauty, fragrance and satisfaction knowing that you can replant year after year and continue to enjoy them.

Over the past five years we have had Michaela's 4 O'Clocks growing on the rooftop of the CT Science Center. With the help of Matt Fleury, TJ McKenna and others from the CT Science Center, Dennis helped begin an educational program for children involving the 4 O'Clocks. Since then we have begun to create Michaela's Gardens throughout the state.

Before her murder, Michaela had discovered Gandhi, and loved the expression "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." She was known to be a quiet friend to all and a defender of the underdog. The weekend she died she was contacting her friends to help raise money for orphaned pets.

Naming a State Children's Flower tells kids that they can have a voice and empowers them to go forward and help others. In addition, it is an easy flower to grow from seed and requires little maintenance so

that even the youngest child can participate. It teaches children about the outdoors, gardening and beauty in a very simple way: Horticulture, agronomy, ecology and the environment all are related to STEM fields. We need more children with an interest in these areas, especially young girls.

Four O'Clocks, or *mirabilis jalapa,* function as an annual in Connecticut, are easy to plant and grow in a full sun environment, and provide flowers from about 8-10 weeks after planting until the first hard frost. They are native to tropical areas of North and South America where they are perennials. They are called 4 O'Clocks because the flowers open later in the day and remain open over night. They have a wonderful aromatic fragrance and typically bloom in red, yellow, pink and white colors; occasionally with a mix or variegated variety. Because of these qualities they were often planted as cottage flowers lining the paths leading to and from homes.

There are clearly many serious issues facing our state, but this gesture to honor a sweet little girl who was taken too soon is a simple way to honor her and inspire other children to participate and help others. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-cheshire-home-invasion-michaela-legislation-20150125-story.html#page=1

William A. Petit, Jr. MD, FACE, FACP