

Testimony of Ethan Ruby
Founder and CEO of Theraplant

In Support of HB 5351 "AN ACT ELIMINATING CERTAIN FEES FOR PRESCRIBED MEDICAL MARIJUANA FOR VETERANS"

Veterans' Affairs Committee Public Hearing

February 23, 2016

Sen. Flexer, Rep. Hennessy, Sen. Martin, Rep. Yaccarino and honorable members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am Ethan Ruby, Founder and CEO of Theraplant. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today.

Theraplant is proud to be one of four medical marijuana producers licensed by the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection. We are dedicated to empowering patients with the highest quality medical cannabis possible. We are passionate about what we do and will never tire in our research to identify and produce new strains of cannabis and healthier delivery methods for the benefit of those individuals suffering from debilitating medical conditions. Our greatest driver in this noble cause comes from directly seeing and hearing from patients right here in this State that benefit from this medicine, especially without the horrendous negative side effects frequently associated with opioids and other pharmaceutical drugs. At the end of the day, we are passionate about improving the quality of life for patients.

Our guiding principle has been and continues to be "Patients First, and Always." With that in mind, we would like to add our support for HB 5351, "An Act Eliminating Certain Fees for Prescribed Medical Marijuana for Veterans." This bill supports those that need it the most, and have given everything to our country. HB 5351 will honor those that have served by eliminating the annual fee required to be paid by Veterans to the state every year to acquire a medical marijuana card from the Department of Consumer Protection. This State has a very strict set of qualifying conditions, PTSD is one of those conditions and it was included because of its positive effects treating the condition our Veterans qualify under. We know that many patients struggle with this financial burden and that includes a significant number who are military veterans. Those women and men that have chosen to serve our country and now find themselves in need of this medicine are entirely worthy of the fee waiver proposed in this bill. It is a compassionate and respectful step for the legislature to take, with little impact to the funds these fees fuel.

Simultaneously, Theraplant is committed to doing our part to help our Veterans here and now. We as a company were the first to provide free medicine under the compassionate care program and we will continue to do so. The committee should be aware that the annual fee required for certification is only one cost of many for patients to remain eligible for medical marijuana. For example, a patient must obtain approval from a doctor every year; and that visit to a doctor for that purpose can cost between

\$150 to \$300. And, once approved there is the cost to purchase the medicine---a medicine that is not generally covered by insurance. It can be an expensive path and one that many of our veterans can't afford. Their choice cannot be between obtaining their medicine or doing without it, especially considering the current suicide rate for Veterans (1 every 68 minutes according to a national report).

Theraplant has always been and is a strong supporter of the "Compassionate Needs Program." In its current form, Connecticut's medical marijuana program does not allow producers to provide a direct discount to patients, however we will continue to deliver free medicine each and every month to every licensed dispensary in the State.

Theraplant is using the opportunity of offering testimony in support of this bill to bring this barrier for Veterans and opportunity to honor them, to the attention of this legislature. Theraplant will continue its work to support those that have served our country in the ways currently available and we thank you for your consideration of this Bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer our testimony. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.