

In regard to Raised Senate Bill 487 AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION, TAXATION AND REGULATION OF THE RETAIL SALE AND RECREATIONAL USE OF MARIJUANA AND CONCERNING THE PRODUCTION AND REGULATION OF HEMP.

Co-Chairs and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Avery Pessa, I'm a resident of Cromwell, a medical marijuana patient, an advocate for medical marijuana patients in Connecticut, as well as an advocate for responsible and equitable legal regulation of marijuana; to reduce harms caused by prohibition.

I am **in support of Raised Bill 487**; that would legalize, tax and regulate the retail sale, personal growth and recreational use of marijuana by individuals twenty-one years of age or older and to allow for and regulate the production of hemp as an agricultural product.

Connecticut has decriminalized possession of less than one-half ounce of marijuana and it's not enough, Connecticut needs to legalize personal possession of marijuana for individuals 21 and older, but I believe the limit should be at least 2oz. I strongly agree with allowing individuals the right to grow up to 6 plants on their own property, as long as that number doesn't include seedlings and non-flowering plants. Allowing marijuana lounges is a crucial part to recreational legalization, giving residents and tourists a private place to consume marijuana; out of public view and away from children.

Connecticut has an opiate crisis, people are overdosing every day, and **legalization can help to reduce the number of opioid overdoses** as it has in other states that have legalized recreational marijuana. Marijuana is not a gateway drug! The gateway is the drug dealer that sells more than just marijuana and can lace marijuana with other drugs.

With a bill to legalize and regulate marijuana there will also be a need for legislation to re-focus criminal justice activities; having them be more effective and less harmful by reducing the role of criminalization, so that people are no longer punished for what they put into their bodies, but only for crimes that hurt others. Connecticut should follow some of the states with legal recreational marijuana and have the courts vacate all misdemeanor marijuana possession convictions that were prosecuted before it was legalized, to help correct the biases of outdated and punitive drug laws. Any person who has a cannabis related offense, prior to the effective date of this bill, should have their sentence commuted to such length of time they have already served, have the balance of any penalties or fees directly related to the offense reduced to zero, and their record cleared. The presence of cannabis components in a person's body, nor the possession of related paraphernalia, nor conduct related to the use of or participation in cannabis related activities, by a person responsible for the well-being of a child, should be used as a reason for any action by a child welfare agency or a family or juvenile court. Minority communities have disproportionately experienced harms from cannabis prohibition. We need to stop spending money to put people in prison for nonviolent drug offenses, when the drug in question is **less harmful than alcohol** and crimes with victims go unsolved! This legislation needs to remedy the cumulative harms of disparities in the criminal justice system and of social stigmatization related to cannabis prohibition, address disproportionate harms to communities of

color and marginalized groups, and pass any legislation that can help repair the damages done by Prohibition and the War on Drugs!

When a bill to legalize recreational marijuana passes, then we will need increased protections of medical marijuana patients' rights, ensuring their medicine won't be taxed in any way and that the price and availability of their medicine isn't negatively impacted by legalization. Connecticut's Medical Marijuana Program has prohibitive prices for registering AND medicine which makes it more difficult (or impossible) for patients to access the medicine that works for them. It is cost prohibitive, not only to current patients struggling to bear the cost of renewing their card, but to many people who have serious and debilitating qualifying conditions. A recommendation for medical marijuana should be at the discretion of the physician, not just a limited and exclusionary list of qualifying conditions. The amount of usable marijuana and marijuana products allowed to be in a patient/caregiver's possession, and the amount of cannabis plants they are allowed to grow, should be determined by the physician giving the recommendation for medical marijuana. Connecticut's medical marijuana patients have problems regarding the availability and quality of their medication. A number of patients, especially those living on a fixed income as a result of their condition, can't always afford their medication. Connecticut's medical marijuana is expensive, with an unreliable supply, so patients/caregivers need the right to grow their own medicine, along with the program adding more growers and producers so they are able to provide an adequate selection for patients. Adding more dispensaries would be beneficial to the program too, but fruitless, as long as the program continues to grow with patients there will be less and less medicine to supply the dispensaries. These predicaments could be, in part, remedied by legalizing cannabis, allowing

patients/caregivers to grow their own medicine at home, ensuring their medicine won't have any added pesticides or harmful chemicals and giving people easier access to this quality of life improving medication!

It's time Connecticut joins Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, and other states in approving legalizing and regulating cannabis!

Thank you for hearing this bill and taking the time to consider my testimony,

Avery Pessa

06416