

Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7135

AN ACT EXTENDING THE VALIDITY OF WRITTEN CERTIFICATIONS FOR MEDICAL MARIJUANA AND IDENTIFYING VETERANS WHO HAVE

Title: PRESCRIPTIONS THEREFOR.

Vote Date: 3/12/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/7/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee
Sen. Eric C. Berthel

REASONS FOR BILL:

As written, the bill extends the length of an initial certification for medical marijuana by one month and requires the Department of Consumer Protection to give qualifying patients an opportunity to identify themselves as a veteran. The intent of the bill is to make the medical marijuana certification process less onerous on veterans who require the use of palliative marijuana.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Michelle Seagull, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection:](#)

Commissioner Seagull stated the department's opposition to the bill, explaining that it would take time to implement, require financial resources, and necessitate programming changes to software managed by the Department of Administrative Services. Additionally, the commissioner raised the concern that making initial certification last a month longer than subsequent recertification could cause unnecessary confusion for patients, potentially resulting in an individual losing access to medication for several weeks.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Stephen Kennedy, Connecticut Team Leader, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America:](#) Mr. Kennedy acknowledged that the bill was a step in the right direction, but criticized the barriers to procurement of palliative marijuana faced by veterans. Mr. Kennedy testified that instead of

prescribing cannabis for pain management, federal VA hospital regulations force doctors to prescribe opioids, which pose a much greater risk to veterans' health. Additionally, federal VA prohibitions on prescription of medical marijuana force veterans to visit doctors outside of the VA system, costing the veteran hundreds of dollars out of pocket. That expense, in addition to the \$100 registration fee necessary to obtain a medical marijuana prescription, greatly limits the accessibility of medical marijuana for low-income veterans, leaving them stuck in the VA system. Furthermore, Mr. Kennedy explained that barriers to procurement of medical marijuana have resulted in veterans who suffer from chronic pain travelling to Massachusetts, where recreational marijuana is legal. While there, they purchase enough marijuana to serve their medical needs until they have the time and money for another trip, opening them up to criminal prosecution for possession of a controlled substance once they return home. He also noted that more than one hundred Connecticut veterans are arrested each year on cannabis-related charges, and that a criminal conviction greatly increases the difficulty a veteran might face when looking for work. Mr. Kennedy concluded by asserting that the time limit on medical marijuana certification should be eliminated, the certification process should only require a VA diagnosis, the program fee should be waived for veterans, and that chronic pain should be added to the list of conditions that qualify patients for the program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed for H.B. No. 7135

Reported by: Benjamin S. Watson, Asst. Clerk Date: March 18th, 2019