

Testimony to Kansas Senate Health Care Strategies Committee in Support of Kansas Medical Marijuana Defense Act

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My name is Rhonda O'Donnell. I am a 45 year old woman who is a happily married mother of two. I am a registered nurse but can no longer work due to progressively worsening disability from multiple sclerosis.

I was an avid advocate for medical marijuana to be legalized in Rhode Island. I'm proud to say that after the RI legislature voted to override the Governor's veto of the bill that was passed to legalize medical marijuana; I was the first one in RI to apply for my medical marijuana ID card. This allows me to use marijuana, with my doctor's recommendation, to help alleviate some of the painful spasms that I suffer due to MS.

It is important to note that 99% of marijuana related arrests are done at the local and state level. When a state is compassionate enough to vote to legalize marijuana for medical purposes, it is PROTECTING its residents. Federal DEA agents in RI stated that they are not going to arrest sick and dying people for using marijuana for medical purposes to help alleviate their symptoms.

Throughout my advocacy I encountered a wide array of people who would benefit from medical marijuana. Some were already using it, risking the embarrassment of possible arrest and legal consequences while others, like me, wanted to wait until it became legal. Some of the examples about people who benefited were from people who suffer from HIV/AIDS who benefited by regaining an appetite, people with chronic pain, people with cancer undergoing chemotherapy who alleviated their nausea and were able to eat, and people with MS suffering painful spasms.

Two of the examples were about people who died over 25 years ago! One was the mother of a friend of mine who was dying from colon cancer. She was constantly nauseas and retching with dry heaves. Her daughter had just graduated from college, had heard that marijuana helped with nausea and appetite, and suggested it to her mother. Her mother was a straight laced, law abiding woman and at first refused. When she was desperate enough, she relented and tried it. The

marijuana quelled her nausea and restored her appetite. She still died of cancer, but at least some of her suffering was alleviated.

The other example was my father. He died in 1980 from cancer. After I began my advocacy a family member told me that my dad had tried it to help him through the side effects of chemotherapy. It broke my heart to think of my dad, a proud, upstanding member of the community having to sneak having a few hits of a joint to help ease his suffering. He had to worry about being caught and arrested in front of his 4 children.

It makes me wonder - how many other people have had to suffer needlessly during the 25 years since they had to and even for decades before that?

My neurologist once told me that marijuana has a way of crossing the blood/brain barrier in a way that just cannot be duplicated medically at this time. It gets to the nausea and pain centers almost immediately. I literally only have to take 2 hits of marijuana before I begin to feel the immediate relief of pain in my legs.

In RI the bill had the support of the RI Medical Society, the RI State Nurses Association, RI Academy for Family Physicians, United Nurses and Allied Professionals, the RI ACLU, and many individual physicians.

Our legislators passed a medical marijuana bill which our governor vetoed but then they overwhelmingly voted to override the veto. The first year it was passed they included a one year "sunset clause" so they could see if any problems were encountered within the first year. The following year they voted to make the law permanent since there was only one problem, a man broke the law by having more plants than the law allows so his ID was revoked. Hundreds of people have subsequently been able to protect themselves from local and state arrest by obtaining an ID card.

I urge you to please consider protecting the residents of Kansas by passing a medical marijuana law. Medical decisions should be made by doctors, not legislators. Please be compassionate and vote for a medical marijuana bill to protect patients and help them ease some of their suffering.

Sincerely,
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