

Madam Chair, Members of the Health Care and Human Services Committee, my name is Cheryl K Smith. I am the Executive Director of Compassion Center, a nonprofit medical marijuana clinic and educational organization at 2055 W. 12th Avenue in Eugene. I am here representing our approximately 1300 patients and members and am testifying in support of SB 281.

Every couple of weeks, a patient comes into Compassion Center asking about getting a medical marijuana card for their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Unfortunately, I have to tell them that PTSD is not a qualifying condition under the Oregon Medical Marijuana Act (OMMA).

Some of these people do have another condition—such as pain, muscle spasms or nausea—but others don't; so they are out of luck. They cannot legally use this herb that has been shown, both anecdotally and by studies, to help with the distressing thoughts and memories that haunt them. If they find cannabis effective in relieving their PTSD symptoms and choose to use it illegally, they risk arrest and fines; if they choose not to, they may find their life unbearable and/or end up in jail when their mental condition deteriorates. In fact, in Alan Cohn, MD, a psychiatrist who worked with Lane county jail inmates for more than 35 years, noticed that using marijuana contributed to success in the community for individuals suffering from PTSD and stated this in an Op Ed in the Eugene Register-Guard last October.

Recently we read that the number of suicides by military service members has now surpassed the number of deaths in combat. A large part of this is the epidemic of PTSD among these men who served our country.

In a survey of Compassion Center patients in 2010, we learned that about 25% of our patients are veterans. A disproportionate number of veterans experience PTSD, but it can affect anyone who has experienced severe trauma. We also learned that nearly 9% of patients responding to the survey use medical marijuana not only for their qualifying condition but also for their PTSD. It

helps them tolerate the distressing symptoms. While reflecting only a small percentage of those participating in the OMMP, this survey echoes what we have learned from different studies: Medical cannabis can be effective in combating PTSD.

A study from Canada found that 72% of individuals treated with synthetic THC experienced significant reduction of PTSD-caused treatment-resistant nightmares. A report from Israel found that cannabis can improve the quality of life for sufferers of PTSD.

While the studies are few, I am aware of none that showed harm caused by using medical marijuana to medicate PTSD symptoms. On the contrary, there are studies showing harm caused by the mainstream treatments now being used, such as SSRI antidepressants and other pharmaceutical drugs.

Please pass this sensible amendment to the law. We owe it to our veterans and all of our citizens who are suffering the fallout from traumatic events.