

Good evening madame co-chairs and members of the committee. My name is Peter Gendron. Thank you for allowing me this time to share opinions on these important matters tonight.

The Oregon Sungrown Growers' Guild was established prior to the passage of Measure 91 to protect and defend our growers and patients and their relationships. After re-legalization we have also become involved in the regulatory process with a keen eye to preserving and protecting the grower-patient relationship that has been established in Oregon for almost two decades. As the President of the Guild, myself and many of my board members have sat on committees implementing Measure 91. Regardless of which bills pass this year, we continue to support the involvement of patients and growers in this process and support their traditional relationships.

Thank you for allowing me to present these ideas on behalf of the OSGG. Tonight I am here to address HB 2198 as originally written, and the concept of integration proposals being considered this session. The OSGG is opposed to merging the medical and recreational programs at this time. Although there has been much discussion about what proper implementation of Measure 91 looks like, there is agreement that given the current political climate at the federal level, the programs must remain unique and distinct. We are also concerned that OLCC related proposals will effectively end the grower-patient relationship as we know it.

Areas of concern include proposals that would prevent a mom and pop from each having a medical card and growing for their own use at home. This is what Measure 67 allows, and not being able to cultivate 12 plants for personal use, as has been the custom since 1998, is against both the letter and spirit of Measure 91 which stated that implementation will not affect the existing medical program.

Our more enlightened officials have come to understand that we are talking about the same plant in either case, but as long as these programs are regarded through a different lens, protection of a robust medical program is crucial to the success of Oregon's implementation goals and the health and welfare of our patients.

There is much discussion about the financial benefits of a successful adult use program. But we hear little about the millions the philanthropic efforts of our medical growers have saved the Oregon Health Plan over the years. Main areas of savings include reduced dependence on opioid pain medication and a general reduction in harm done by the over prescription of other medications. Benefits include improved quality of life for people who have access to medical marijuana.

The OMMP was never designed to be a revenue generating policy. When considering that over 40% of cardholders qualify for a means tested reduction in fees, this money is truly being taken from some of the poorest Oregonians. Although this is not a large sum in the scope of Oregon's budget, it is financially significant to the people paying these fees. In fact with the increase in fees required last year by the OHA, participation in the OMMP has waned. Some of the people who would benefit the most are simply priced out of access now.

Although there is substantial anecdotal evidence to demonstrate the benefits of the OMMP, there is little real data to back it up. Why? Because of the hands-off approach the OHA has taken to this vital and popular policy. Over the years little effort has been made to quantify the benefits with our surplus contributions. One way to remedy this would be through an autonomous Medical use of Cannabis Board to manage and account for this program.

I served by appointment of the Governor on the SB 844 implementation task force along with Representative Wilson. One of the recommendations we made back to the legislature was the creation of the Oregon Cannabis Research Institute. An agency which could oversee both the existing OMMP and conduct research to bolster the state's position on cannabis policies. Ideas like this are mirrored in the proposal of an Oregon Cannabis Commission under SB 300 this year, which we find as complimentary to HB 2198 as originally drafted.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is currently in charge of testing for hemp, and is a natural fit for regulating marijuana production as well. We have clarified in law that this is a farm use crop, and as such it makes sense to have control assigned to the agency which already oversees the production of all other agricultural commodities. From the regulatory point of view, it makes sense to put oversight of cannabis production in the hands of the agency which has the best infrastructure already built to oversee production of this commodity. Research could be better facilitated under either of these models, and with clear direction we are sure the agencies involved would help maintain Oregon's gold standard for cannabis.

First, do no harm. This is the easiest way to summarize the hippocratic oath. I urge the committee to consider this carefully when making decisions affecting the health of all of our cannabis programs. Additionally, please consider the things state agencies are already tasked with when looking at program costs and viability. In the case of cannabis it makes sense to have direct oversight from professionals in the field for this growing industry. This may mean some additional expense, but greatly increased benefits to Oregon from both the practical and legal points of view when looking at creating a program that could eventually cover all cannabis production in Oregon. There is no hurry here as we move forward with laws designed to develop these programs with a keen eye to the interest of public health and safety for all Oregon.

Thank you again for your time this evening.