

JOINT COMMITTEE OF MARIJUANA REGULATION

Public Hearing on House Bill 2198-7

April 25, 2017

Good evening Madam Co-Chairs and members of the Joint Committee of Marijuana Regulation. My name is Bernadette Hansen - I am a wife and caregiver for my husband. And on behalf of caregivers for individuals living with chronic, life threatening diseases, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 2198-7.

Fifteen years ago, my husband was diagnosed with Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency (Alpha-1), a genetic condition that results in serious lung disease in adults and/or liver disease at any age. He inherited this disease from his father, who subsequently died of the disease at 42 years of age. Alpha-1 is a chronic disease that results in destruction of lung tissue leading to acute emphysema and/or lung cancer. It can also result in cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer. To date, my husband has lost over half of his lung tissue, resulting in severely diminished lung capacity – in layman’s terms, he is slowly “drowning to death.” When your body doesn’t get enough oxygen, one suffers from hypoxemia (low oxygen in your blood), which can lead to hypoxia (low oxygen in your tissues). This not only causes physical symptoms such as severe peripheral neuropathy, shortness of breath, rapid breathing, and high heart rate, but over time can lead to psychological symptoms such as claustrophobia, panic attacks and other anxiety disorders because you can’t catch your breath. My husband has been given a disability rating of 100% disabled from both the Social Security Administration and the Veterans Administration (he is a veteran who served as a submariner in the Navy). At this time, he is on numerous drug treatments, including an augmentation therapy (bi-monthly infusions) that costs over \$15,000 a month. These treatments bring some relief (i.e., better able to breath) and the augmentation therapy slows the progression of the disease but is not a cure.

Five years ago, I quit my job as the Executive Director of a local watershed council. This was a decision that both my husband and I made together. In my husband’s words, “Though I am still young, these are ostensibly my golden years and I want to spend them with you.” We tightened our belts and now live on a greatly diminished income. As is the case with most chronic and acute diseases, this not only impacts the diagnosed person, but also the lives of their loved ones.

Approximately two years ago, my husband and I applied for and received medical marijuana cards. It was a costly endeavor (\$150.00 doctor visit and \$200.00 for the card every year), but well worth the money if it would ease some of the pain and discomfort suffered on a daily basis. To date, I can unreservedly say that medical grade marijuana has improved my husband’s quality of life dramatically. Although he still feels constant pain, it is much diminished, he is able to sleep through the night and his panic attacks have lessened considerably. He tells me all the time what a blessing this has been and we are more than grateful that it is now legally available to him and others who suffer similarly.

The reason I support HB 2198-7 and respectfully request your support is to make sure that we can preserve this vitally important program and not have it bogged down as it currently is under the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). The last two times we’ve attempted to reapply for our medical marijuana card, we never received our renewal packet and had to wade through OHA’s bureaucratic red tape to obtain one. Modernization of the program is overdue.

In addition, my husband and I would like to become our own grower and have the plants grown at a site other than our home primarily for security issues (safety of the family). If we wish to do this, it will cost us an additional \$200.00, thereby making the whole program cost prohibitive.

And finally, HB 2198-7 will modernize the program and allow patients to continue to have access to medical grade cannabis. Bottom line, I believe this bill will make the medical marijuana program more efficient, more effective and will allow access to a secure, cost effective program that will benefit patients now and in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I tell you my story, not to win your sympathy, but rather your vote to ensure that people suffering with chronic and acute illnesses will have continued access to life-enhancing and pain relieving medical marijuana. I appreciate the steadfast support of the Committee and its focus on improving the medical marijuana program for both patients and caregivers. As a state, we cannot afford to let this program stagnate because of the status quo. We must make wise long term decisions now to continue this invaluable program for our loved ones. Your time and consideration is very much appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted,

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