

Testimony of Alexandra Ford
Executive Director
Rutland County Organics

March 31, 2016

Good morning and thank you for having me. My name is Alex Ford and I'm the executive director of Grassroots Vermont, formerly Rutland County Organics, located in the town of Brandon. We provide support to patients with ailments such as cancer, MS, and chronic pain and our demographic is primarily people over the age of 50. The products that we provide make a real difference in these patients quality of life.

I'd like to state that I agree and support with the additions that Shayne and Monique have proposed. I'd like to ask you to consider a few additional laws that seem to be a real hardship for patients.

1. First, as statute reads now, Vt medical marijuana patients can only change dispensaries once in 90 days, and must pay \$25 to change dispensaries. We would like to see this changed to 30 days.

In a perfect world, patients should have the choice to move freely among dispensaries.

We all carry different strains and products at varying prices, and we have new strains and products coming out all the time.

You and I have the right to choose which pharmacy we want to... Medical marijuana patients should have that same freedom of choice.

In fact, one of the benefits of the new delivery program is that patients can access products from any of the dispensaries, not just the one that is located closest to them. But again, they can only change dispensaries once every three months and it costs them money to change each time.

The problem is that in order for patients to move freely among the dispensaries, would need a new software system that could track patient purchases in real time. The costs would no doubt be prohibitive.

At an absolute minimum, we need to change the 90 day wait time to 30 days. I believe Shayne and Monique would support this, as well as DPS. And if we ARE going to CUT fees anywhere, THIS is where we should cut them. We should not be charging patients \$25 every time they change dispensaries.

2. Another hardship for patients is the duration of the provider/patient relationship. The law defines a “bona fide health care professional-patient relationship” as “a treating or consulting relationship of not less than six months’ duration.”

We need to shorten this time frame significantly, or get rid of it altogether, in order to better serve the patients of Vermont.

23 States and the district of Columbia have full medical programs (and an additional 12 with high CBD programs) and it is NOT common to have a time requirement on the physician relationship. What’s happening across the country is what’s happening in states like MA and RI where the requirements are that:

1. physician needs to do a full assessment of the medical history and current condition
2. talk about possible benefits of medical cannabis
3. and then verify the qualifying debilitating condition.

Some things to consider when we think about this 6 month requirement:

1. A patient’s physician leaves the state or a physician retires. This patient must then wait 6 months to continue their medication. Keep in mind that a patient must renew their paperwork every year.
2. You are diagnosed with cancer and begin working with an oncologist. Perhaps your general practitioner doesn’t recognize the benefits of medical marijuana. Now you have to wait 6 months before the oncologist can sign your paperwork? You could be done with chemo before the 6 months is up.
3. People who are aware of the medical benefits of marijuana may very well turn to the black market rather than wait the 6 months.

4. Physicians are not prescribing medical marijuana...they are simply validating the qualifying debilitating condition.
5. In the State of Vermont a physician can prescribe opiates to you on your very first meeting.

****The bottom line is you either have the qualifying condition or not.

There's one more thing I'd like to add. The bill as passed by the Senate requires that individuals who provide financing for a marijuana business be Vermont residents.

It is extremely difficult to raise capital in the cannabis industry. The residency requirement for financiers would create a significant hardship for us to get capital. Grassroots Vermont has relied solely on out-of-state loans to keep our business going. What price will we pay for that capital if we can only borrow from the richest Vermonters? And will capital even be available to us?

We also believe the residency provisions in S. 241 are unconstitutional. You have received a memorandum from our attorney John Hollar that describes in some detail why the courts have not allowed states to discriminate between in-state and out-of-state residents.

Advertising: It doesn't make any sense to allow advertising for adult use but not for medical. I should think we would want that flow of information regarding the medical benefits of cannabis.