



VERMONT
CANNABIS TRADES
ASSOCIATION, INC.

To: Members of House Judiciary and Human Services Committees
From: Shayne Lynn, Executive Director, Champlain Valley Dispensary, Inc. (CVD)
Re: S.241
Date: March 31, 2016

Thank you for having me here to testify. My name is Shayne Lynn. I am the Executive Director of the Champlain Valley Dispensary, Inc., which operates two of the four non-profit medical marijuana licenses in Vermont. We serve the Burlington (CVD) and Brattleboro (SVW) areas.

Currently, 23 states and the District of Columbia have approved medical cannabis for patients, with another 16 states allowing for CBD-only cannabis products. Our research shows the average age of CVD's patients is 55 years old, with a breakdown of 48% female and 52% male. Currently only 0.3% of Vermont's population uses the medical marijuana program, compared to the national average of 0.9%.

About CVD

We provide cannabis to 60% of the registered medical marijuana dispensary patients in Vermont. We ensure that there is a consistent supply and our patients have convenient access, because we are open six days a week. Our 3rd year anniversary will be in June.

Currently, CVD has a staff of 40 employees and expects another 5 to 7 employees to be hired by the fall as we expand operations to meet the growing registry list. We provide starting wages above minimum wage and have a goal to offer employees health care by 2017.

Expansion to For-Profit Corporation

CVD's ability to expand to meet the growing demand of patients has been wholly dependent on debt financing with the support of private individuals. Currently, we cannot borrow capital from banks to expand with the growing demand, and, as a non-profit, we do not have the ability to offer equity to private funders. The Federal Government does not recognize us as a non-profit, since cannabis is still classified as a schedule 1 drug. Consequently, CVD's resources are diverted from its core mission, as it needs to constantly focus on raising capital in small increments every month. This poses significant challenges to maintaining the efficiencies and quality we need to provide to our patients. Developing access to capital is critical. We do not want to see this industry fail because of needless restrictive regulations to capital. The language in S.241 that allows us to convert to a for-profit corporation will help to support our industry.

S.14/S.241

Last year, the Senate passed S.14 which made improvements to the medical marijuana law. This year, the Senate incorporated S.14 into S. 241, which we support. The medical marijuana law has helped over 2,500 Vermonters and I hope that, with these changes, the program will remain viable. We are committed to creating a culture of responsible cannabis use in Vermont.

Expanding the Qualifying Conditions

We believe more Vermonters need access and alternative medications for symptom relief. Cannabis can provide an important and effective alternative to the current opioid-based options for pain management. We suggest Vermont expand the qualifying conditions list to include: anxiety, chronic debilitating pain, inflammatory bowel syndrome (including Crohns, ulcerative colitis), insomnia, migraine headaches, Parkinson's, PTSD, and lastly opioid addiction.

Expanding the conditions, not only is compassionate, but it strengthens the role of the health care professional-patient relationship. Instead of those with the above serious illnesses seeking illegal marijuana and self-medicating, they can be open and candid with their health care professionals about their usage, ensuring proper treatment and guidance. The dispensaries can then provide safe, high quality medicated products to patients. With medical marijuana only being in its third year here in Vermont, educating on proper dosages, consumption methods and side effects of cannabis use is extremely important.

Health Care Professional-Patient Relationship

The medical marijuana law defines a “bona fide health care professional-patient relationship” as “a treating or consulting relationship of not less than six months’ duration...” This long duration (6 months) is another hurdle Vermonters face seeking an alternative to traditional pharmaceuticals. While we believe this requirement has been successful in reducing “doctor shopping”, it can, and does, drive people to the illegal black market.

When doctors retire, patients must then find a new doctor to renew their registry card. This leads to frustration and anger because the wait to see a new family doctor can be 6 to 8 weeks or longer. Adding that to the 6-month requirement means that a patient may be without the needed medication for 8 months.

If a patient seeks a specialist for treatment, they will need to wait 6 months before they can be verified to use cannabis. This is an undue burden on patients seeking relief from their symptoms.

We suggest reducing the timeframe from 6 months to 2 months (60 days). This will allow new patients, as well as new Vermont residents from other medical marijuana states, access to their medicine in a more timely manner.

Thank you for this time and opportunity to speak with you today.