

Greetings Representative Pugh and other members of the committee,

My name is Eli Harrington and I write today as an advocate for cannabis reform in Vermont and as the co-owner of Heady Vermont — an independent publishing and events company, as well as a consultant who works with entrepreneurs and businesses in Vermont hoping to understand the future impact of cannabis reforms. I am not a registered patient or caregiver, however, over the past three years, I've dedicated myself to speaking with thousands of Vermonters about cannabis — including hundreds registered medical patients — and to understanding the policy decisions being made in Vermont and other states.

To be completely transparent, our company, Heady Vermont, has worked directly and successfully with Vermont's medical marijuana dispensaries (as well as their multiple affiliated companies operated under different trade names) and received direct funding for sponsorships, as well as in-kind contributions for their staff speaking at our events.

Let's start with the outrageous, but true fact, that today in Vermont, it is harder for someone suffering from chronic pain — whether from cancer, Crohn's or arthritis — to legally acquire a medical marijuana card to reduce their suffering, than it is for perfectly healthy me to legally acquire a firearm. This isn't about firearms, but it's a pretty dramatic contrast when we think about individual rights.

It's also outrageous, but true, that today in Vermont, having a debilitating medical condition which qualifies you to become a registered medical marijuana patient means that if you choose to treat your illness with cannabis, you have fewer rights than healthy Vermonters.

For panel members: Did you ever need to buy a membership card from Rite Aid to pick up your Tylenol? How about being told by the state that if you want to purchase your Midol or Ibuprofen, that you can only ever shop at Walgreen's? You don't know if Kinney Drugs has better prices or selection, because the state says that even though you've paid \$50 for the right to buy your aspirin, you can only shop at Walgreens.

Considering the restrictions imposed — never mind the price discrepancy — it's surprising that Vermonters who use cannabis for therapeutic purposes don't ALL turn to the grey market in Vermont, where prices are literally half of the dispensaries, or travel to any of our neighboring states, such as Maine, where medical marijuana patients can easily and inexpensively purchase legal cannabis. Many do.

If anything, with the passage of Act 85/H.511 and recognition that Vermonters 21+ can possess and cultivate cannabis, we need to change the paradigm with medical marijuana so that new legislation is giving people with debilitating medical conditions MORE rights than the rest of us, not fewer.

Changing the laws to allow trained, qualified medical professionals to ALLOW (doctor's don't recommend or prescribe cannabis in Vermont) patients to try cannabis would give

more Vermonters the ability to use safe, tested, medical cannabis products (with their doc's knowledge). It's hard to imagine how allowing a willing medical professional to sign a medical marijuana patient for someone with glaucoma or Lyme disease would pose a public safety risk or impact anyone except that patient and the dispensary serving him/her.

As for dispensaries themselves, the request to sell THC clones to the general public not only flies in the face of the purpose of the medical marijuana registry — to serve sick people with therapeutic cannabis options, not sell to the general public — but is downright disrespectful to the 6000+ patients who would watch their service provider(s) dedicate time and effort to growing and selling clones for profit, rather than spend those resources serving their patients.

Did you know that according to their own internal survey, 33% of the patients at the state's largest dispensary have an income of LESS than \$19,000 per year?? Learn more about the patient experiences in their own words from this 2016 survey, funded and commissioned by the dispensary itself.

There is already a systemic imbalance in the supply and demand in the Vermont Medical Marijuana Registry, created by a legislative mindset that prioritized “public safety” over the rights of sick and suffering Vermonters. After fourteen years of medical marijuana in Vermont, it's time to shift the balance back towards the rights of individual patients.

Below are a list of some specific recommendations that I believe would dramatically improve the rights of patients:

Specific recommendations:

- Allow patients to grow up to six mature plants (anyone 21+ can grow six plants in Maine and Mass; registered patients in Vermont can grow exactly the same amount as anyone 21+ as of July 1st.
- If, and only if, individual patients/caregivers can grow more plants, allow dispensaries to grow three (3) mature plants per patient. If the ones selling the plant for profit are the only ones allowed to grow more plants, than this is a special interest bill, not a medical marijuana bill.
- Allow caregivers and patients to act as caregivers for up to five (5) registered patients in order to better serve individual patient needs not met at dispensaries, and to
- Allow patients to purchase cannabis from any registered Vermont dispensary...there is no reason to maintain what is the definition of an economic cartel and subject patients to artificial pricing.
- Allow dispensaries to sell to out-of-state registered patients...medical patients from other states also come to VT, and building a regulated supply for tax-and-regulate

It's up to the legislature to decide what the arrival of a paradigm in which any 21+ Vermonter can cultivate and/or possess cannabis means for those 6000+ Vermonters who are sick and suffering and have proven and paid for the right to use cannabis for therapeutic purposes. In the future, our policies can promote both a safe atmosphere for all 21+ cannabis consumers, AND still protect the rights of those who need access to this plant the most.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Very Respectfully,

Eli Harrington

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