

Testimony Presented to the **House Committee on Government Operations**

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Welcome to our family's lives. A life now filled with delusional thoughts and insult. Once a good life filled with soccer championships and a promising career as an apprentice plumber. All of it derailed by my son's steady use of high potency THC in the confines of a good neighbor's home. Surrounded by his high school buddies. It's a life of schizophrenia. It's a life that has changed my marriage, my relationship with my children, my relationship with my grandchildren and neighbors. At times I'm overwhelmed by a nightmare. The notion that, we're on the verge of normalizing pot to the extent that pacifiers will be impregnated with THC.

The high school buddies are long gone. We have separate dinners during holidays. We argue over the dangers of antipsychotic drugs. We argue over calling the police. We argue over trying to preserve our own health and sanity. Statistics bare out the fact that we will die earlier. Because of the stress. Our grandchildren don't understand. Their parents feel a need to protect their preschoolers from their brother. As a result, we don't see them often. Instead we plan for a retirement. Much different than we imagined. Our wealth diminished by court costs and lawyers and the search for medical solutions. Precious time and money spent feeding, clothing and housing a permanently disabled loved one. Someone who can't manage on his own.

I don't want to be here. I don't want to relive this. But you have abdicated your oath to protect Vermont's citizens. My participation and your willingness to hear my story tells me everything about the mindfulness charter of this committee. But on the other hand, it tells me nothing about why we're proud to be Vermonters. Marijuana use was illegal and harder to get when marijuana induced psychosis struck my son. He was twenty. I knew he tried pot like we all did. But I was unaware that over the decade, technology has weaponized this genetically altered breed of plant.

The representatives on this panel and various other committees have been presented with evidence. Ubiquitous THC in all its forms are factors in its use at an earlier age. You have been presented with controlled medical studies.

Correlations between THC and schizophrenia. You have seen the statistics. Harm caused by commercialization in Colorado. You have access. Studies explaining how important pruning of the brain synapses is for brain health in young adults. And that THC inhibits that culling.

The legislature has taken action against unvaccinated people. Protect the immune compromised community. Tell me how many people are dead or permanently disabled because they were exposed to an unvaccinated person. And then compare it to the amount of people who will be disabled by the exposure to weaponized commercial THC. We see them more than ever now in the ER and at NAMI support groups. Regulation doesn't take away the liability of psychosis. Putting an age requirement into law doesn't shield underage consumption. Taxation funds don't cover for a life time of disability costs.

My ask is for members is to gain the insight needed to produce or deny policy that protects our communities. I don't want to wait until your loved ones, spouses, sisters, brother, niece and nephews, sons, daughters and grandchildren suffer the throws of marijuana induced psychosis. So far you have chosen to marginalize the science against commercialization and underestimated the discipline needed by curious underage individuals to exercise restraint. I urge the committee to wait another year or two while new data and science will be released on the subject.

I am one of many who have chosen not to come forward until today. If you fail to act, there will be a tsunami of adolescent addiction and unintended consequence.

My son can no longer ask coherent questions, so I will.

Why are you unleashing an industry that promotes a business model to get 20% of its users to consume 80% of its product only to find themselves addicted, incarcerated and disabled?

Why are you making it more difficult to keep families together?

More won't be able to cope and more will take their lives!

It's a no brainer. If my son had his mind back. He would argue that pro-commercialization advocates are more insane and delusional then he ever was or will be. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Thank you for listening.

Because of the acts of contrition in this testimony, I request for the committee to seal this testimony and not have it made public.

My statement of encouragement and gratitude for the NAMI family of support here today is best expressed in The Hollies 1969 song "**He ain't heavy, He's my Brother!**" I'd heard it a thousand times back then but until recently I didn't absorb the gravity of the words.

It begins with the lyrics "**The road is long.. With many a winding turn.. That lead us to who knows where.. Who knows when**" For us that live with mental illness or advocate for their loved one these words are self evident. In my son's case it was literal; disappearing with only the clothes on his back and surviving for six months before receiving a call for help more than 400 miles away. He hung up without telling me who he was or where he was. I later talked to the man who lent his cell phone to my son that day. "He looked emaciated and exhausted and I bought him a sandwich, he said. I hoped he would get the help he desperately needed".

"But I'm strong.. Strong enough to carry him" the song continues. So I printed out flyers and sent them to city outreach programs in hopes to locate my son who was now living on the streets of Philadelphia.

At times our loved one's are struggling with a mind that behaves in a crippling manner. In some respects, Dick Hoyt, the father who pushes his son's wheelchair over the finish line each year at the Boston Marathon has it easier than me. In our world the marathon may consist of navigating addictions, homelessness, incarceration, mania, depression, paranoia and delusional thinking. There is no finish line, only the uncertainty of what will come next. But come what may, I'll be there and my son counts on it. **"So on we go.. His welfare is of my concern.. No burden is he to bear.. We'll get there"**.

"For I know.. He would not encumber me" This lyric reminds me that all my son wants, is to be normal. To have his life back. His disease is at fault, not him. My obligation requires me to reject the behavior of his illness. Not spar with it, but embrace the son I know that still lies beneath it.

I've transcended my sadness, my burden, my embarrassment by looking at this man in the mirror and making a change. When I changed the way I looked at the face of mental illness, the mental illness face I looked at changed. If I have regrets at all, I regret not doing more from my lessons learned. For through this adversity I have been taught the virtues of tolerance, compassion and gratefulness. Back to the lyrics **"If I'm laden at all.. I'm laden with sadness.. That everyone's heart.. Isn't filled with the gladness.. Of love for one another"**. I'm eternally grateful for that man in Philadelphia one hot, summer day in August who made a change in our lives.

Like the song says **"It's a long, long road.. From which there is no return"**. It's true my son lost his plumbing apprenticeship and his love for the game of soccer among many other things. There has been personal sacrifice as well but we both have learned to cope and have realistic expectations for the future. **"While we're on the way to there.. Why not share"**. **"And the load.. Doesn't weigh me down at all"**. I have surrendered my sovereignty over the illness to a higher power and ask for his providence. Because **"He's my brother"** and **"He ain't heavy"**.