

**March 14, 2023**

**BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE**

**Senate General Government Committee**

**Written Testimony of James Russell II**

**OFFERED AS A PROPONENT AS TO**

**SENATE BILL 9**

Chairman Rulli and honorable members of this committee, thank you for allowing me to offer written testimony today as a Proponent of Senate Bill 9 (SB 9).

Hello everyone, my name is James Russell II and I would like to express how cannabis and the Ohio Medical Marijuana program have affected my life for the better and my experience speaking with other patients that cannabis has helped. Cannabis has allowed me to function at a high level in many aspects of my life where it was previously difficult due to living with chronic pain. I have a unique experience with cannabis as I not only am a patient but I have been able to assist other people with their medical needs and cannabis by working in the industry.

Throughout my upbringing I was always against the use of cannabis due to the rhetoric that has permeated throughout society and the view that cannabis is an “illicit drug” that has no benefit on the daily life of human beings which could not be farther from the truth. I was an athlete in high school participating in Football, Wrestling, and Track & Field which put some wear and tear on my body that started noticeably affecting me once I started to pursue athletics in college.

I suffer from chronic lower back pain which started to affect the feeling that I had in my legs which stopped me from pursuing my dreams of advancing my athletic career. Once I started seeing a pain management specialist the first course of treatment was a prescription of opioids as surgery was not an option due to the location of my injury and the risk of causing further damage. After feeling the side effects of prescribed opioids I knew very quickly that this was not going to be a long term solution.

I became a patient in the Ohio Medical Marijuana program in 2020 and to be honest I was and still am disappointed in the state of the program once I joined as there are many things about the program that are not supportive of patients. The most glaring issue with the program is the sheer cost of medication. Many patients I have spoken to in my time working in the industry have expressed concerns about being able to continue getting their medication due to the sheer cost of products here in Ohio and how they have to resort to going to states like Michigan due to pricing and quality products being available. A huge portion of our patients are leaving the state to obtain their medicine and are subjecting themselves to large penalties and potential incarceration due to not being able to afford similar products in their own state.

Another issue that patients have expressed to me is the quality of the products we have in our program. With a limitation of 70% THC content in cannabis products, this requires cultivators to dilute their products with filler materials that degrade the products themselves and reduce the desired effect. Having a higher content limit would allow cultivators to produce more diverse, higher quality products to help aid patients in their quest to find a working solution.

SB9 is a positive move for all of the patients in the State who lean on this program to live a better quality of life. This bill will allow easier access to medicine by allowing more dispensaries to serve patients in areas they have limited access, increase the amount of product able to be produced, which in turn decreases cost and allows cultivators to focus on producing the highest quality products, allow for more qualifying conditions to be added to the list which would allow more Ohioans access to alternative medications to help an expansive list of conditions, consolidate all regulation under one agency which will allow for clearer oversight and less red-tape dealing with multiple government entities, and it does away with high cost, overbearing regulation which stops creativity and development on the production side which stops patients from having access to a wide range of products, traditional and non traditional.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony in support of SB 9. I respectfully request that the Committee favorably report this bill as soon as possible.