

BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE
GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
HEARING ON SB56

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Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear, and members of the General Government Committee. My name is Don E Wirtshafter, I am an Attorney with the Athens County Bar. In addition to the practice of law, I have been engaged in the legal cannabis industry for over 30 years.

I speak of my own experience. I am not an investor or employee of any of the players. My statements are my own and based on my expertise and experience.

On behalf of an American investor I supervised the funding and administration of the one entity that was licensed by the government of The Netherlands to conduct research breeding varieties of Cannabis for medical use. In 1988, this research led to the formation of GW Pharmaceuticals, a British company that obtained a license from the Home Office to breed cannabis varieties and start the long path to making these plants an acceptable medicine. Because of bureaucratic delays, it took almost 25 years of expensive research, involving more than 100 clinical trials, and hundreds of researchers, before our first product made it to the market.

Sativex, or Nabiximols, is a formulation of natural extractions from a high-yielding THC variety and a high-yielding CBD variety of Cannabis. Sativex gained acceptance first in Canada in year 2003, It has quietly been on the market for over 20 years. Sativex has now been accepted as a medicine in over 40 countries around the world. It can have remarkable effects on people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and other spasticity disorders. Sativex is not available to the more than one million people in the USA who suffer from MS. Why? There is way too much bureaucracy here.

Epidiolex was GW's second development. It is naturally extracted from proprietary high-yielding CBD varieties. Epidiolex/Epidyolex is the first prescription formulation of plant-derived cannabinoid approved by the FDA. Epidiolex is intended for epilepsy and associated diseases. Because Epidiolex contains only trace levels of THC, it did not meet the bureaucratic objections that Sativex faced in its development. Epidiolex has been proven safe and effective on three forms of childhood epilepsy according to FDA standards.

Epidiolex has not been tested on adults. Adults with MS in this country might find a doctor to prescribe Sativex for them, but insurance reimbursement will be a battle.

Understand, both these drugs are natural extractions of Cannabis. To be granted drug approval these drugs needed to pass the vigorous standards of the FDA. To gain approval, cannabis extracts were put through a full battery of toxicology tests. They underwent full quality verifications that took several years to complete. These direct extracts of Cannabis were tested

for their potential to induce cancer. They were tested for their drug liability, whether or not they could cause former junkies to relapse. Participants in the trial were monitored closely looking for signs of mental distress or impairment. They were administered driving and other performance tests. All this had to be reported to the FDA.

If Cannabis caused mental illness, violence, physical problems, cancer, addiction, or any of the major problems you seem worried about, these drugs would have never made the market. These prescription drugs are safe, grown in a pesticide-free greenhouse, and processed under medical grade, FDA-inspected, conditions. The approval of these medicines does not say that cannabis not grown and processed under these exacting conditions, is safe. But these approvals do go a long way toward relieving concerns about dangers of medical marijuana and adult-use marijuana available in Ohio.

Because the slow pace of drug development is matched by the slow march of legislation, the development of more pharmaceutical cannabinoid medicines is stuck. These developments leave the people of Ohio no alternative except to use what is available. Enough people in Ohio have seen successful results of their friends and relatives use of Cannabis for medicine that 57 percent of Ohioans voted it into law. I ask you to not override the vote of the people.

There is no objection to combining regulation of hemp, medical marijuana, and adult-use cannabis into the same department for efficiency. We, after-all, regulate the raising of cows, tomatoes, and lions all under the Ohio Department of Agriculture. But we have different sets of laws and regulations designed to the needs of each industry. We don't try to regulate the keeping of dangerous lions under the cow or tomato growing standards. But this seems like what you are trying to do to hemp, medical marijuana and adult-use cannabis. Please don't take our innocuous industrial hemp and try to regulate it like you do the lions.

We have a budding hemp industry in Ohio. Not the initial flush of CBD scams, the second wave of the hemp industry is far more substantial, and sustainable. Industries are springing up to use industrial hemp from Ohio farms. Please don't do anything to impede this progress for Ohio's farmers and Ohio industries.

Rather than cutting back on natural cannabis products, the legislature needs to do what the governor and many others consider the priority, that is to do something about the synthetic c(*&)(p making its way from China to our gas stations. These imitation weed products are where all your problems are coming from. I realize this is a discussion for another day, SB86.

Thank you very much. I will stand for questions.