

TESTIMONY

Chairman Rulli, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Brian Soderston. I am a 61 year old Ohio resident, and have been a lifelong cannabis user. I am currently the Secretary for NORML Appalachia of Ohio, the local chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. I strongly support Senate Bill 261.

I currently use cannabis medically to treat chronic back and hip pain, arthritis, severe depressive disorder and anxiety. I weaned myself off of Gabapentin (nerve pain), Meloxicam (joint pain), Prozac (depression), Buspirone (anxiety) and Seraquel (anxiety and sleep issues). All had major side effects that I was no longer willing to accept. All of these pharmaceuticals were paid for by state funded Medicaid. I no longer have unbearable pain (it's manageable), I have lost 70 lbs of the 150 I had gained (weight gain is one of the aforementioned side effects), and all symptoms of depression, anxiety and sleep disorder are manageable. All of this is due to the use of the proper, (for me), CBD and THC levels in cannabis. Unfortunately, I only receive 784 dollars each month in SSI benefits so, after paying my bills and living expenses, I am unable to afford our Medical Marijuana Program although I am qualified. The high initial costs involved in getting a card along with very high dispensary prices put legal access out of reach. I'm sure I'm not the only Ohio resident in this situation.

This brings me to my reason for testifying. I would like to thank you for considering SB 261. This can be a huge step forward for Ohio in regards to patient access. In addition, I urge you to seriously consider the bills currently introduced in the House of Representatives (when they make it to the Senate), and any that may follow, with a thought to how they will affect the citizens of our state. You can make a real difference in the lives of responsible adults. The policy of cannabis prohibition is an idea that has never worked. It was a way to eliminate competition, was a racist attempt to control certain peoples and became a weapon against political enemies (the anti-vietnam war protesters). Scare tactics, myths and outright lies fueled a war on drugs that has cost our nation billions of dollars with no end in sight.

Ohio has been slow to change, but progress is being made. We have a chance now to change policy in a way that can be an example to the rest of our country. Aside from our medical program we need legalization for adult use. We need to follow New York State in the complete descheduling of marihuana at the state level. We need an adequate homegrow allowance, without a homegrow provision our medical program is pretty much useless to many veterans, and those on SSI or SSDI. As someone who has grown in the past, I know that the overwhelming majority of people will not take the time, spend the money on lights, nutrients, etc., or expend the energy to learn how to grow cannabis. Those that do will have the experience necessary to do it properly, safely, and in a healthy manner.

Expungement of prior non-violent cannabis offences as well as pardons for those in prisons should be included, as well as employment and housing protection. There are many other aspects to the issue left to discuss. The positive things include decreased opioid prescriptions, hospitalizations, and overdose deaths, lower health care costs in general and Medicaid in particular, increased revenue for our state, and freeing up law enforcement to handle serious crime. A portion of the additional revenue could be used to fund treatment programs and increased access to mental health services.

I would be more than willing to supply current research and studies, discuss the health benefits of cannabis, and dispel the old myths that have been around since the 1930's. Thank you for your time.

Finally, I would like to provide a quote from a great American.

"Prohibition... goes beyond the bounds of reason in attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation, and makes a crime out of things that are not crimes. A prohibition law strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our government was founded." Abraham Lincoln - 1840

I ask you to consider my testimony and give your support to, and vote yes on, this important, life-changing, and life-saving bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.