

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 Sheila Billman. . I'm a marijuana card holder and patient. I strongly support Senate Bill 261.

22 years ago when I was pregnant with the youngest of my two girls, she put pressure on my spine leaving me with a bulging disc. This put pressure on my spinal column to the point where I could not straighten up without crying in terrible pain or walk without dragging my leg behind me. This was the beginning of the ride of my life.

Rather than Vicodin or Percocet, I was started out on 10 mg of oxycontin. The first dose caused me to vomit for hours, to the point where I couldn't even lift my head up anymore. I called the doctor to say I didn't think I could take oxycontin. Rather than prescribing a different pain medication, they prescribed phenergan for the vomiting. After a week, I no longer needed the phenergan, but now I couldn't even take care of my new baby because of the effects of the oxycontin. I looked like a heroin addict. At least that's what I was told, because I was falling asleep while smoking a cigarette, drooling on myself in the middle of conversations, and much worse for the next few years.

Until I said that's enough, I can't do this anymore. I went to my doctor and begged him to get me off of this legal heroin. He then had me hospitalized to detox off of oxycontin and be put on methadone. Now that's much better right? This is the help I was offered. I was on methadone for the next few years until the L-4 disc finally slipped and I had to have emergency surgery because I lost my bodily functions. After the surgery I was put back on oxycontin, with no choice now, because my tolerance for opiates was very high. I was sent to pain management where I was told that if I have marijuana in my system I'll lose my prescriptions. I only smoked it at this time to help me with my pain. I knew nothing of ingesting the plant or how to use it topically yet.. I just kept taking my oxycontin. How ironic it is that I started out vomiting if I took one, and at this point, if I didn't take more than one I would vomit every 20 minutes and experience terrible pain. Just as much pain as I had with my back, but this withdrawal pain is very different, even my fingertips hurt. Fentanyl patches were prescribed because of the countless procedures I was forced to undergo in order to remain registered with pain management. Procedures like a myelogram and a discogram that ruptured my disc, causing more pain than before. I also have facet disease caused by the amount of blood they had to put into my spinal column because of the hole from a spinal tap. It was so bad I was bed bound for almost 3 years due to these procedures and nerve blocks and injections into my spine and in my nerves.

I was told I'll never get better and that I'd end up in a wheelchair just from the scar tissue I have. They kept saying things like this to me over and over until I met a doctor named Lisa Brown who, after doing a procedure told me never to let anyone touch my spine again. She said that the dye they had injected into the sides of my spine just leaked out because the discs are so damaged. What to do now. I was told to just accept this way of life, now damaged and unable to use my body to its fullest potential.

I lay in bed another year watching documentaries on food and health and learning the medicinal purposes and values of plants and vitamins and antioxidants and how all these nutrients are what the body needs to survive and heal, free from disease and pain. And that's just what I did. I ate only fruits and vegetables mostly raw and I started to ingest cannabis. And I started getting rid of the inflammation and half of the pain that I was enduring.

I kept working on building my strength from there... I have a whole new life now because of cannabis and plants. There's no reason we should not be allowed to use nature for healing. That's what it's for. My life would have been very different if I had known this earlier. I wouldn't have been looked at like a drug addict all my life. Even by the "drug dealers" who gave me the prescriptions to take home. My children were robbed of their mother's presence in their life when they were very little toddlers and in grade school, not because I was out sticking a needle in my arm or smoking drugs but because I was a prescription junkie passed out or had just burnt a hole in my clothes by the oxycontin effects. There isn't anything marijuana can't replace in the medical world. There is no reason it can't be recommended by a doctor when we know it's medicinal value and healing properties. When we know better we should do better, and now we all know better. I believe it's up to you to help us do better now. We have to do better to be better. Please do better for the next human being who is suffering whether it be from pain, cancer, anxiety, depression or whatever. No one should suffer when the solution is known to us.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this life-changing bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.