

Federal and State Affairs Committee

Topic: HB: 2184

Hearing Date: February, 24, 2021

From: Lisa Sublett

To the Committee Members and the Chair,

Many of you know me. I have been advocating for Kansas patients and their right to medical cannabis since 2011. I have never before come to you outside of my position with various organizations and written to you regarding my family. I have always hesitated to do so because my dedication to this issue has always been based on the overall struggle to see every Kansas patient who needs access to medical cannabis to finally win that access to legal and safe medicine. The mission has always been my focus. I also felt a hesitancy to highlight my family and the need to shield them from my public work and any possible backlash that may result.

Today, I want to tell you of my father who spent a lifetime in public service to his community in Kansas City, and indeed received many honors for his life of service but died a painful, painful death. My father was still alive when I began this journey of advocacy. He was well experienced at life in the political realm and gave me guidance. My parents are of "The Greatest Generation" and I was unsure of their reaction to my advocacy initially. They both embraced it and encouraged me. My father suffered greatly. He was not granted an easy passing. A lifetime of diabetes and other health conditions that haunt my father's line and the years of pharmaceuticals had taken a deadly toll on his kidneys. As they shut down, he suffered from wild swings in potassium levels that resulted in excruciating muscle spasms and cramps that would bring his knees to his chin. This was just one of the horrors he endured. Cannabis could have helped my father.

My mother is 96. She is in a nursing home. She suffers everyday in pain. She is given pain killers several times a day. She also has Stage 4 kidney disease. I spoke with her last night and she was very sick as her pain medications had once again caused terrible and painful constipation that leaves her nauseated and often vomiting. Cannabis could help my mother.

My husband is a former first responder. He has PTSD. He has nightmares several times a week. He has a wonderful therapist but refuses traditional medications because of his concerns about their side-effects. He is often exhausted and tries his best to manage his PTSD with coping skills. His PTSD impacts our family. Cannabis could help my husband.

My oldest daughter has a Traumatic Brain Injury -TBI from a car wreck and several complicated health issues, as well as Complex PTSD. She suffers from Epilepsy and also has seizures in her sleep, which places her at risk for SUDEP, a condition where seizure patients seize and die in their sleep. The long term side-effects of her seizure control medications are grim. The neurological impact of her TBI and seizures have resulted in a difficult and profound cognitive decline. Cannabis could help my daughter.

One of my sisters has cancer. She is retired from the CDC and has been a health nut for her entire lifetime. Luckily, she lives in a legal state. She did not just peruse online articles. She did research worthy of her former career. Cannabis has helped my sister.

Finally, I have been a spinal patient all of my life. I have Scoliosis, and have endured spinal surgery with more surgery on my horizon. Beyond that, I am an Autoimmune patient and have Hashimoto's. I also have PTSD. I have lived with pain all my life. The last few years I have lost mobility at an ever increasing pace. The pain has now become debilitating. I have spent time bedfast, in a wheelchair, on a walker and with my cane, in a cycle of doing better and then not doing so well. I now often sit to cook dinner and can only clean and do chores in small metered amounts. I call it my pain thermometer. I keep pushing until it maxes out and then I must recline in my raised bed until the pain becomes manageable again and I can return to my task. This is also why I can no longer lobby and had to retire from my work at the capitol. My doctor said my next surgery will keep from being paralyzed but will not alleviate my pain. I thanked him for his honesty. I have permanent nerve damage, restless leg syndrome resulting from my nerve issues and severe muscle spasms. Yes, cannabis could help me.

I share all of this to tell you that while I never started advocacy for myself or my family, life can take you there. A devastating car wreck can happen. Your condition can take a downwards turn. A family member can have a horrible and life-altering injury or be diagnosed with a horrible disease or illness. We are just one family. One of many Kansas families that could be given the gift of a better quality of life. We look for no cure but an easing of the daily suffering, a lessening of harm from our current prescriptions and some hope. If you and your family would not choose a natural alternative, I respect your choice. Please, respect ours.

And just as a side-note, my husband and I are teetotalers. We do not even drink alcohol and have no interest in being in an altered state, as many opponents put forth in an attempt to slander patients and undermine our legitimate medical need for relief. I even turned down pain meds after my last disc replacement surgery, much to the chagrin of my neurosurgeon, because I have no interest in being at risk for addiction, nor being totally out of my gourd, sleeping all day and useless. That is exactly what all my prescriptions have done over the years, besides also harming my internal organs and putting me at risk for things like instantaneous death but sudden onset stomach hemorrhaging. Hey, that sounds fun, right? No, I rarely touch prescriptions other than for my spasms or unless my pain is intolerable, because of these very side-effects. If I do take them it is only because I have no other legal choice. I know the research, as I have spent over a decade studying cannabis, and I know how the psychoactive side-effects of cannabis can be managed, reduced and even eliminated. I have no worries that I can fully manage my symptoms and never have to be "high." It is not an experience that I would welcome. I also know there is an addiction risk with cannabis that is only equal to that of caffeine. Compared to my pain meds? That is a no brainer choice.

I thank the committee for taking up this issue. I thank all the lawmakers that I have worked with over the years and your years of unwavering support for Kansas patients.

I guess many of you will be surprised to know that I am one of them. My mission and my advocacy were dictated by my faith and my parent's example of service to others. It was something that I kept separate from myself and my family. I feel very vulnerable sharing this information. I do so in hopes of promoting understanding that the families who need access to this medication live next door to you, worship with you, work with you, etc. Many may not share their need for this medicine, as I have chosen not to share until this time.

I also share because at any moment, it could be your family that next finds themselves in our exact shoes. It can happen in the instant of a car wreck, or in the short time it takes for a first responder to be held with a gun at his head or for that brief visit when an oncologist gives you the news you never wanted to hear. It can also happen over a lifetime and rob us of any ease in our later years and in our passing. This is my family.

I pray that compassion and common sense will overtake your deliberations when you work this bill. I pray you will move forward on behalf of Kansas patients.

Lisa Sublett
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