

January 24, 2023

Thank you Chairman Weisz and The Human Services committee for allowing my testimony today. I am Gail Pederson, from District 24 in Valley City. SPRN in Holistic Nursing, Cannabis Nurse educator and a member of the American Cannabis Nurses association's Government Policy and Advocacy Committee. I am speaking in favor of House Bill 1478, relating to the self-certification of an individual 65 years or older for medical cannabis use.

Senior citizens are the fastest growing demographic for medicinal cannabis use. An increasing percentage of older adults are turning to the use of cannabis exclusively for therapeutic purposes. In a survey of Medicare recipients, 21 percent of respondents reported that they were current users of cannabis for medical purposes. Survey respondents were most likely to report using cannabis products to address symptoms of anxiety, chronic pain, depression, glaucoma, and HIV/AIDS.

An increasing body of scientific data shows that the use of cannabis by older adults is associated with improvements in their overall quality of life. In *Frontiers of Medicine*, An article titled *Adherence, Safety, and Effectiveness of Medical Cannabis and Epidemiological Characteristics of the Patient Population: A prospective study* states

“We describe the characteristics and outcomes of approximately 10,000 patients treated with medical cannabis. ... Quality of life (QOL) was assessed both at intake and at 6 months in 4,143 patients. While only 12.9% of patients reported good QOL prior to treatment initiation, 69.9% reported good QOL at 6 months. ... Results showed high adherence, high safety with a low incidence of adverse events, and a high rate of effectiveness in the prescribed treatment, as well as a decrease in pain levels, improvement in QOL, and a reduction in the consumption of concomitant medications.”

Why is this bill necessary? One simple word. Access! According to Americans for Safe Access State of the State report for 2021, North Dakota has a D- rating. The rating for access to medicine is 10/100. We can do better. The “bonafide relationship” in our law has created exactly what the legislators did not want our program to have. Right now, a patient/senior citizen wanting to utilize cannabis has 3 possibilities. One, their provider does certify. Two they are interested but don't even bother asking as they know their provider won't certify, or #3-they doctor shop. That comes at great out of pocket patient expense. I've heard \$200-400 every 6 to 8 months for some patient's recertification. More often than not, the patient has a better understanding of how cannabis works than their provider. This rift has caused patients to leave their long standing providers that will not certify them, because of either an unspoken or spoken institutional ban or no desire as a provider to learn about the important endocannabinoid system-now being called the master system. This amendment could actually strengthen bonafide provider-patient relationships, allowing patients to break the myths of cannabis therapeutics with their long time providers. I am fortunate that my long time provider trusted my knowledge. I am certified within my usual check ups....it is not any extra charge. This bill would allow for an important change for those that don't have this support.

Problems with access for senior citizens also comes with cost and difficulty getting cannabis products. We have the most expensive products in the country and honestly, some of the poorest quality I have encountered. Our dispensaries do offer a 10 or 20% discount for seniors. Personally, recently retired and on a fixed income for the first time, I have struggled with the price, as I had to choose between an expensive prescription drug and cannabis. I have taken advantage of changes made last legislative session and have a caregiver in a city with a dispensary. If there is a sale on a product I use, I do not have to travel the 120 miles just to purchase it. My caregiver can purchase it and I am able to pick it up when I have to make a trip to the larger metropolitan area.

Access, our patients need access no matter if they are a senior citizen or not. Our program does not provide easy access. This is one small step. Please vote favorably for HB 1478. Thank you. I stand for questions.

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