

TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE TAYLOR BRANN
BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE
ON SB 1182 THE GOVERNOR RAYMOND SHAFER COMPASSIONATE
USE OF MEDICAL CANNABIS ACT

Today, over 20 states have adopted medical marijuana laws. Are these states more immoral, subject to more criminal cases clogging their courts, is the Federal government or FDA swooping in to close up shop? The answers are no. I am a mother of a 3 year old son with Dravet Syndrome, a catastrophic form of epilepsy. His name is Garrett. I am a life-long registered Republican, who has come to understand that medical marijuana is not only the right course of treatment for our son, it's unfortunately the only course we have left. I implore you to reach the same conclusion.

My husband and I have never really known our son, as his seizures started when he was 6 months old. With each seizure, skills or developmental gains he had accomplished are extinguished. He barely speaks and only my husband and I (and our 7 year old daughter) really understand him. As if his seizures aren't excruciating enough to watch him suffer, they have left him temporarily paralyzed, have taken away motor skills, coordination, as the seizures essentially slow the brain and prohibit it from developing normally. He can't run, jump, climb steps and when he's over-stimulated his brain seizes. Over-stimulation for him consists of merely being too happy. So often when we are overjoyed that he's engaging with his sister playing, we are left feeling defeated as it results in his having a seizure which takes him the majority of the day to recover.

We go nowhere without our rescue medication and have our escape route wherever we go: usually taking two cars just in case we end up in the emergency room. Garrett sleeps with a seizure monitor, if not with us.

At this rate, he will never live independently, and will have to remain in the care of me and my husband or perhaps his sister when we are no longer around. Of course, we live with the possibility that one of his seizures ends up being the one that doesn't stop and ultimately causes his death. I know first-hand that this very scenario has happened at least 3 times since Thanksgiving to young children.

At age 3, Garrett's been on approximately 10 different anti-seizure medications. None have stopped the seizures, which is the goal so his brain can rest and have a chance to develop. He's currently on a combination of 3 medications. One of which is already classified as a controlled substance and is highly addictive. Another costs thousands of dollars and comes from Europe and is not FDA approved. Yet, both have been prescribed by our son's neurologist who also is in favor of medical marijuana. Our son's medications carry with them severe side effects: liver failure being one and our son gets routine urine and blood test. He walks around sometimes eyes glazed over because of all the medication.

His quality of life has been so severely compromised by Dravet as is the case of the lives of so many children and adults who have seizure disorders. As is typical with Dravet, this condition will not improve, but only deteriorate, with many children unable to walk or speak at all.

It is beyond brutal trying medication after medication in hopes of helping our son and knowing that we haven't been able to. This is where medical marijuana comes in. I assume the learning curve my husband and

I went through is typical. We didn't know that a child doesn't smoke it. We actually laughed with images of our toddler lighting up a joint. After seeing Dr. Sanjay Gupta's report we began to research in depth. Unsolicited, friends and family (whether conservative, liberal, Republican or Democrat, or somewhere in between) expressed excitement for this treatment option. Not one person thought it was a bad idea or remotely criminal because it came from the marijuana plant. These opinions are supported by recent polls in PA and nationwide with over 80% approval for medical marijuana use.

Those that have been fortunate to live in legal states and have used medical marijuana for seizures are not getting high, they don't smoke it, there are no dangerous side effects, and it's not addictive. The seizures have stopped and children are regaining lost skills and beginning to finally reach developmental milestones. Those children are also able to come off of the other medications, which weren't working anyway, and restrictive diet therapies and feeding tubes.

It is unfathomable that in the United States children of some states are afforded a treatment option that we in PA do not currently have. This, despite our son's doctor's support for medical marijuana. Pennsylvania's children are no less important than children in other states. Please don't perpetuate this disparate treatment. As a parent, Pennsylvania's stance places an unreasonable guilt and burden as we all try to do what is best for our children's health.

Every month, dozens are moving to Colorado, often with spouses and siblings having to separate, while one parent relocates with their son or daughter seeking relief through medical marijuana. There have been so many that they are known as "medical refugees." I submit that Pennsylvania has now been provided SB 1182 which permits the use of medical marijuana under narrow and limited guidelines, but which will dramatically improve the health of our children and positively impact families here.

I urge, plead you to approve of this Bill and to do so quickly as the more times goes by, the more irreparable harm is caused by our son's seizures.

I also plead with you to put aside whatever preconceived notions you may have about marijuana and look at it from the viewpoint of your constituents, as a means to protect our children and to see it as the medical marijuana it is and not the taboo drug it has been historically labeled. Kindly be mindful that the United States holds a patent on CBD/cannabinoids as a neuroprotectant and antioxidant; yet, it remains classified as a Schedule I controlled substance. This patent contradicts the very definition of a controlled substance, as our federal government has recognized the medicinal benefits of CBD.

This treatment may be our last chance and our son's only hope to have a quality of life that any parent would want for her child and to be viewed as just another regular kid.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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