

Testimony in Support of SB 1548

From: David Rettew, MD

Medical Director, Lane County Behavioral Health

Date: February 11, 2016

Dear Chair Reynolds and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr David Rettew. I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist and work as the Medical Director of Lane County Behavior Health, a community mental health clinic in Eugene, Oregon. I am a member of the state's System of Care Advisory Council. I am also on faculty at the Oregon Health and Science University and Western University of Health Sciences but today am writing only on behalf of myself and Lane County government.

I am very much in support of whatever remains in this bill and was disappointed to see so much of it go away.

When Oregon and other states were debating legalization, what we heard over and over from cannabis advocates were comparisons to other legal products like alcohol and a plea to have cannabis regulated the same way. Instead, what we got was an industry that has resisted even some of the most basic and common-sense regulations, like this one. We really should not be surprised as this is exactly the struggle we went through with big tobacco.

I have said many times that while I do not think cannabis is the most dangerous substance on earth, I do think it is the substance that has the largest gap between its publicly perceived dangers and its actual dangers.

Every year the research studies mount about the harmful effects of cannabis, yet the public is incredibly unaware of these risks in part due to the disinformation spread by a cannabis industry bent on putting profits ahead of public health. As a result, cannabis related health problems are an ever-growing percentage of emergency department and hospital admissions, as you have heard. Many of these poisonings are occurring from consuming edibles where the amount of THC being used is not clear. Because of the more delayed effect from edibles, people don't know how much they've taken until it's too late.

In my practice, I can say without hesitation that cannabis is by far the most destructive substance that is wrecking the lives of the adolescents I am trying to help. At the same time, I have had some great successes when I am able to offer science-based education to a teen or a parent who is willing to listen. I've seen kids be able to go back

to school, I've seen them be able to get along with their families again, I've been able to stop antidepressant and antipsychotic medications.

People know that fentanyl isn't good for you. They know that excessive alcohol use can cause serious health problems. Alcohol, cigarettes, even toys for children, have warning labels. So many people, however, do NOT know about the health risks associated with cannabis use. Some of this is on the deceptive practices of some advocates and the cannabis industry, but a lot of it is on us, for allowing this level of ignorance and lack of regulation to continue for so long.

We are long overdue to actually start regulating this drug.

As you have seen, the state of Washington has recently enacted some of these proposals and have seen drastic reduction in the amount of cannabis related poisonings. Given these data, this bill is absolute slam dunk, and it is truly astounding how someone could oppose this given what we now know.

This bill is a very modest step, but still an important one, and I support its passage.

Sincerely,

David C Rettew

David C. Rettew, MD

Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist

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