

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Kyle Baker 271-2609

SB 159, relative to qualifying medical conditions for the purposes of therapeutic cannabis.

Hearing Date: March 20, 2017

Time Opened: 9:00 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:00 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Bradley, Avard, Gray and Hennessey

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Hennessey

Bill Analysis: This bill adds Ehlers-Danlos syndrome to the definition of "qualifying medical conditions" for the purposes of therapeutic cannabis.

Sponsors:

Sen. Feltes

Sen. Reagan

Who supports the bill: Kimberly Pang; Sen. Dan Feltes, Prime Sponsor; Lena Zerbinopoulos; Annaca Cook; Mark Zerbinopoulos; Wendy Hawkins; Heather Nichols; Lynnette Stebbins; Will Anderson

Who opposes the bill: Kate Frey, New Futures; Gretchen Gott; Valerie Acres, NH Medical Society

Who is neutral on the bill: Michael Holt, DHHS

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Sen. Dan Feltes – Prime Sponsor

- This Bill would add Ehlers-Danlos syndrome to the definition of “qualifying medical conditions for the purpose of therapeutic Cannabis.
- This disorder attacks a person’s connective tissues and causes many of their joint to be permanently dislocated.
- This syndrome causes a large amount of pain.
- This syndrome fits into the cannabis program and in along the line of the original intent of the program.
- The more a person learns about this syndrome, the more you will realize how important it is to have this syndrome placed into the program.

Kimberly Pang – Patient with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome

- Disease that causes joint instability and frequent dislocations along with severe chronic pain.
- Current treatments include opioids and NSAID which do offer relief for some but there are many who cannot tolerate the side effects.
- This painful and disabling condition often impacts someone's life as much as Multiple Sclerosis.

Lena Zerbinopoulos

- Patient with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome
- This syndrome causes severe and debilitating pain.
- The chronic pain often affects a patient's mental health as well
- Other aspects of this disease can affect a person's kidneys and other organs which limits the type of medications a person can take for pain relief.
- Being able to use cannabis as a treatment can allow patients to continue to live a normal life.

Annika Cook – Advocate for Ehlers Danlos Syndrome

- Was able to receive a medical cannabis card for chronic and debilitating pain.
- Cannabis has allowed her to live a more normal life.
- Had very bad side effects from other treatments and cannabis allowed her to get the relief she needed.
- Cannabis is a last resort for many patients. Patients are constantly trying to adapt their life to keep healthy and avoid as much injury

Sen. Avard – Is there a large community that is affected by this disease?

Cook – It is growing community. As the awareness continues to grow we meet more and more people with this disease.

Wendy Hawkins

- The pain experienced by people with this syndrome is totally debilitating.
- Not being able to maintain a normal life causes a lot of mental health issues including severe depression.

Heather Nichols

- 1 in 5000 people suffer from this syndrome
- Some patients are able to qualify under the current law but there are a lot of hoops to jump through.
- Adding this syndrome to the list would allow all patients access to this program.

Sen. Bradley – So you are able to reduce or eliminate opioid use due to cannabis?

Nichols – Yes. People with our disease try as much as possible to avoid opiates because of the side effects but sometimes there is no other option. By using medical cannabis, patients are able to get relief without the bad side effects.

Lynette Stebbins

- EDS has caused her to need 16 surgeries in the last two years.
- Doctors are just now starting to understand how this syndrome is affecting patients.
- Often patients are only able to receive physical therapy for so long and eventually have no other choice than surgery which causes more pain.
- There are many underlying medical conditions that come with EDS that patients need to figure out on their own.
- Currently does not use opioids because of the risk of addiction.
- Cannabis would give patients more options.

Mark Zerbinopoulos

- These patients experience high levels of pain that severely affect their day to day life.
- Even if opioids offer pain relief, patients are often left with serious mental health issues such as depression. Using cannabis would allow them to continue with their life and help get them out of a dangerous state of mental illness.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:**Kate Frey – New Futures**

- Concerned that there has been no review from the oversight commission that was put into the law when the therapeutic cannabis program was established.
- Would urge the legislature to have the oversight commission review this proposal and then come back to the legislature with research and recommendations for the future.
- The commission is made up of experts in the field and they should be given the ability to

Sen. Avard – How long does the research take to look at a particular disease.

Frey – There are issues with the federal law regarding medical research of cannabis. There are studies being done and the results need to be looked at.

Gretchen Gott

- Patient that suffers from EDS
- Patients need to develop strategies for dealing with their condition.
- Needs to look at other ways of treating pain such as exercise, ultrasound therapy and strengthening weak areas.

Neutral Information Presented:

Michael Holt – DHHS, Policy Administrator for Cannabis Program

- Here to Answer questions

Sen. Bradley – Would the cannabis program have any problem increasing the amount of people in the program if we were to add this disease to the list?

Holt – No. Since the program is self-funded, any new administrative costs would be paid for by the registration fees.

Future Action: Ought to Pass

KRB

Date Hearing Report completed: March 24, 2017