



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

**Testimony Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies: “2023 Member Day Hearing”**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Earl Blumenauer".

Chair Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I first introduced the Veterans Equal Access Act nearly ten years ago after veterans in Portland shared their struggles with mental health and the tremendous relief medical marijuana provided. While these veterans were able to get the help they needed, in accordance with state law, they could not do so through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because of a longstanding VA prohibition.

Despite many veterans across the 37 states that have enacted medical cannabis programs reporting using cannabis for medical purposes, the VA continues to prevent its health care providers from reflecting their best recommendations related to medical marijuana as a care option for veterans. No such prevention exists for the myriad of prescription drugs that have significant side effects. This policy forces veterans outside of the VA to access care their states have legalized and regulated.

Congress has enacted appropriations language to protect the implementation and operation of state-legal medical marijuana programs for nearly a decade. Today, 37 states have enacted medical marijuana programs and 18 states have acted to legalize adult use programs—with eight of those states enacting adult-use programs since the start of 2020.

That is why, in partnership with Congressman Brian Mast, I am requesting that your subcommittee include language in the base text to ensure VA health care providers are not prevented from completing forms reflecting their recommendations in compliance with their state’s medical marijuana regulations and to protect veterans’ benefits from punishment for those complying with their state’s medical cannabis program. It is time that Congress takes this small but impactful step to support our veterans’ equal access to this care option.