

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
OF
VETERANS CANNABIS COALITION
FOR
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE LEGISLATIVE HEARING
ON PENDING LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, D.C.
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Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, and Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs,

The Veterans Cannabis Coalition would like to thank you for the opportunity submit a statement for the record to the Committee concerning veterans and cannabis issues currently under consideration. We would especially like to thank the Committee for its continuing work to address the needs of veterans for effective, low-risk treatments. The staggering rate of veteran deaths by suicide and overdose (an outcome that is too often ignored) is indicative of the ongoing crisis in our community. We know what veterans need to be successful, because they are the same basic components every citizen needs for success: patient-centered healthcare, housing, and gainful employment.

Overview:

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has several bills related to cannabis and veteran issues currently before the body. Collectively, these bills seek to address the friction that exists between federal and state law and better understand cannabis and how veterans use it medicinally. The underlying issue of prohibition is beyond the scope of the Committee, but there are still many ways to serve veterans by addressing specific concerns that have arisen.

Current Legislation

H.R. 2676 - VA Survey of Cannabis Use Act (Moulton)

Position: **Support.** We appreciate the intent to establish the shape and extent of cannabis use among veterans but would add that a survey of this kind would create the opportunity to collect important information about veterans current and past pharmaceutical and drug use. There is an immediate need to establish a clear picture of how substances are impacting veterans and we should be looking at the full range of substance use: alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceuticals (of particular interest is non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) opioid, benzodiazepine, and antidepressant use), and illicit drugs.

H.R. 2677 - To require VA to provide training in the use of medical cannabis in conjunction with medical schools that have incorporated education on medical cannabis into their curricula. (Moulton)

Position: **Support.** VA physicians are not unique in lacking substantive knowledge about cannabis, cannabinoids, or the endo-cannabinoid system (ECS)—this lack of knowledge is

reflected in the larger medical community. This particular point was highlighted recently in an op-ed in the Journal of the American Medical Association. While the need for primary education is apparent, we would suggest that conditioning VA participation on the actions of an independent party (a medical school, in this case) leaves too much room for delay.

Past statements have made it clear that if cannabis remains a Schedule I substance, VA will not support changes to how they interact with cannabis beyond some narrow adjustments. Simultaneously, the Department has boasted that some 70% of the country's doctors receive professional training at VA facilities—this would suggest that VA is uniquely equipped in leading the development of cannabis education for providers, has the resources necessary, and therefore should do so with all haste.

[H.R. 712 - VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act \(Correa\)](#)

Position: Strongly support. The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act is a much needed, directed effort to jump start VA cannabis research. The Department has publicly disclosed two cannabis research studies and identified one specifically at the University of California San Diego. Our concern is that the UCSD study uses a limited form of cannabis (synthetic cannabidiol (CBD) isolate), is still recruiting for a target sample of 136, and is scheduled to be completed in 2023. It costs \$1.6 million, which is a rounding error in a Department with a \$200 billion budget.

VA has demonstrated that, as mentioned before, they do not intend to support changes to the status quo without a change in cannabis' schedule. This is, frankly, a shirking of responsibility to veterans, of which 1-in-5 surveyed by the American Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) self-report using cannabis for their service-connected injuries. It is especially striking in light of rampant veteran suicide and overdose, a noted lack of urgency or results from the VA in stemming or reversing these outcomes, and the link many veterans have reported between attempted suicide and legal pharmaceutical use. One of the answers to this inertia and a status quo that sees at least 6,000 veteran dead by suicide and overdose a year is a robust, funded, and coordinated research initiative lead by VA that explores the potential of cannabis.

[H.R. 1647 - Veterans Equal Access Act \(Blumenauer\)](#)

Position: Strongly support. The language in this bill has been introduced for the third Congress in a row and represents a basic concession to the needs of veterans who use the VA as well as closing an obvious gap in continuity of care. The fact that this effort is still not in law, that it is still opposed by VA, and is still being asked for by veterans is another demonstration of the disconnect between those charged with providing the best care possible and those they serve.

Conclusion:

The sheer number of bills introduced in the 116th Congress dealing with veterans and cannabis demonstrates both an immediate need for reform and a critical lack of progress at the VA's current self-directed pace. Congress and the VA both have a historic responsibility to veterans that has devolved into endless rounds of delays, denials, and unfulfilled promises while veterans die at a staggering pace, day after day, year after year. As advocates, we see how this grind is

damaging our community on a regular basis and see few solutions being offered and fewer still being acted on. It is far past time for members of Congress to listen to veterans themselves and do everything in their power to deliver on the promise the nation makes to every man and woman who serves in uniform.

Respectfully,

Eric Goepel
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