

Rep. Correa Testimony before House Veterans Affairs Committee re H.R. 1003 The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2023

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and other distinguished members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to testify in support of my bill, H.R. 1003 The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2023.

My work with veterans started while I was serving in the California State legislature. I met veterans with both visible and invisible wounds from war and they explained to me that they didn't like being prescribed opioids and other medications. They wanted to be able to access cannabis to ease their pain without the same side effects or addictive properties. When I came to Congress, I wanted to continue my work to provide our veterans with the treatments they want.

While data is limited, the American Legion, a congressionally-chartered Veteran Service Organization, commissioned a nationwide survey in October 2017 on a portion of its approximately 2.2 million veteran members and found that 92 percent of all respondents support medicinal cannabis research and 82 percent of all respondents support legalizing medicinal cannabis. The survey also found that "22 percent of veterans are currently using cannabis to treat a medical condition." Therefore, medical research into the safety and efficacy of cannabis usage for medical purposes is timely, necessary, and widely supported by the veteran community. Veterans in 38 states can purchase medicinal cannabis and recreational cannabis in 23 states— more than even just 2 years ago. Although they can discuss cannabis with their VA healthcare provider, VA providers are not allowed to recommend cannabis as treatment. This raises serious questions as to how effective these discussions are. As so many veterans are currently using cannabis for medicinal purposes, it is important that clinicians be able to fully advise veterans on the potential impacts, harms, and benefits of cannabis use on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain.

In a Senate Veterans Affairs hearing in June 2021, the written testimony provided by Dr. Upton stated that the VA is "already dedicating resources and research expertise to study the effects of cannabis on conditions affecting veterans," but they have serious ground to make up given that one of these two studies doesn't even look at THC, we need to ensure that vets aren't left in the dark in terms of cannabis knowledge. The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2023 requires research into the safety and efficacy of medicinal cannabis usage on veterans diagnosed with PTSD and chronic pain.

The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2023 is a pragmatic and bipartisan piece of legislation that would advance our understanding of the impacts of medicinal cannabis usage and could improve the lives of veterans and other Americans. This bill passed out of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee unanimously in February.

Please join me in helping to make sure we're looking after our veterans and giving them the safe and effective treatments that are demanding.