

Testimony of Congressman Lou Correa to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on H.R. 2916, The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and other distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, it is an honor to submit to you my testimony in support of my bill, H.R. 2916-- The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021.

My work with veterans started while I was serving as Chair of the Veterans Committee of the California State Senate. In my role, I met and worked with veterans struggling with their invisible wounds of war. 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 of opioids. 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 can purchase medicinal cannabis in 36 states and recreational cannabis in 19 states. Although they can discuss cannabis use with their VA healthcare provider, those providers are not allowed to recommend it as treatment. As so many veterans are currently using cannabis for medicinal purposes, it is important that clinicians are able to fully advise veterans on the potential impacts, harms, and benefits of cannabis use on conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain.

In a Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing in June of this year, the written testimony provided by Dr. Mark Upton, the Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Health for Community Care of the Veterans Health Administration, stated that the VA is "already dedicating resources and research expertise to study the effects of cannabis on conditions affecting Veterans," but given that one of these two studies excludes tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), there is more work to be done to ensure that we have all of the facts for our veterans.

The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021 requires research into the safety and efficacy of medicinal cannabis usage on veterans diagnosed with conditions such as PTSD and chronic pain. The VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021 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.

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