

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5379

As of February 18, 2015

Title: An act relating to adding posttraumatic stress disorder to the terminal or debilitating medical conditions that qualify for the medical use of marijuana.

Brief Description: Adding posttraumatic stress disorder to the terminal or debilitating medical conditions that qualify for the medical use of marijuana.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Kohl-Welles, Rivers, Hatfield, McAuliffe, Chase, Keiser and Jayapal.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health Care: 2/17/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Staff: Kathleen Buchli (786-7488)

Background: In order to qualify for the medical use of marijuana, a person must be diagnosed with a terminal or debilitating medical condition. These conditions include cancer, HIV, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, intractable pain, glaucoma, Crohn's disease, Hepatitis C, nausea and wasting diseases, and chronic renal failure.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious condition that can develop after a person has experienced or witnessed a traumatic or terrifying event in which serious physical harm occurred or was threatened. PTSD is a lasting consequence of traumatic ordeals that cause intense fear, helplessness, or horror, such as a sexual or physical assault, the unexpected death of a loved one, an accident, war, or a natural disaster.

Summary of Bill: The definition of terminal or debilitating medical condition is expanded to include PTSD.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: In treatment for PTSD, one type of treatment is not appropriate for all who have this condition. The use of marijuana to treat PTSD will provide PTSD sufferers with another option. People who use marijuana to treat the symptoms of their PTSD find relief without the side effects of pharmaceuticals. Marijuana helps people with PTSD maintain a higher quality of life and helps people to function and to sleep on a normal schedule. There is no risk of losing Veterans Administration (VA) benefits for veterans who use marijuana to treat their terminal or debilitating medical conditions and the VA supports the medical use of marijuana. This is not just an issue for veterans; it will apply to all people who have PTSD. Marijuana provides a safe alternative to the use of opioids; there is a significant decrease in deaths relating to opiate use in states that allow marijuana to be used to treat PTSD. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide per day and use of marijuana to treat PTSD will help to reduce this number. Research does support this bill. Washington should lead in research relating to PTSD. Authorizing use of medical marijuana for PTSD may encourage people to enter into the health care system. Veterans who use marijuana to treat PTSD should also be required to seek treatment. Smoking or vaping marijuana produces an immediate calming effect for people. There is still a stigma relating to use of marijuana and many people will not admit to use because they are concerned about repercussions such as losing their jobs. It will be too expensive for people with PTSD to go to a recreational store and they will need to grow their own marijuana. Recreational stores will not have the compassion toward patients that medical stores will have. Traumatic brain injuries should also be included to the list of terminal or debilitating medical conditions.

CON: Research does not support the claim that marijuana is helpful to people who have PTSD. Marijuana use correlates with poor outcomes and studies show that it aggravates mental illness.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Jedidiah Haney, CAUSE-M, President; Patrick Seifert, Americans for Safe Access, Rainier Xpress, Veterans; Skip Dreps, Advocate Adviser, NW Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America; Jennifer Estroff, Americans for Safe Access; Gina Garcia; Catharine Jeter, Veteran, Independent Cannabis Producers Cooperative; Ezra Eickmeyer, PnE Strategic Consulting; Lukas Barfield, Allison Bigelow, Americans for Safe Access; Randy Madden, Steve Sarich, Breck Roundtree, Rick Frances, Kory Kemp, Tara Kemp, Todd Dearing, citizens.

CON: Seth Dawson, WA State Psychiatric Assn., WA Assn. for Substance Abuse Prevention.