STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Department of Health
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September 18, 2017

Public Hearing

IN RE: MEDICINAL MARIJUANA REVIEW PANEL
BEFORE:
CHAIRMAN ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D.

PANEL:
CHERYL A. KENNEDY, M.D.
JESSICA ANNE SCERBO, M.D.
STEPHANIE ZARUS, PHARM. D.
MARY M. BRIDGEMAN, Ph.D.

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CHAIR ALEX BEKKER: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is Dr. Alex Bekker. I am the Chair of the Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel.

Also in attendance today are all the members of the Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel: Dr. Jessica Anne Scerbo, Dr. Stephanie Zarus, Dr. Mary Bridgman, Dr. Cheryl Kennedy. Not all the members of Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel are present today, but this hearing is being transcribed. And I assure you that the transcript, along with any written comments submitted today, or at any time during the public comment period, will be sent to all panel members for their review and consideration.

Notice of this hearing has been posted on the department's website and sent to the Secretary of State who posted the notice in a public place. Notices also were published in two newspapers: The Star Ledger and Courier Post.

Today's hearing is being held to invite comments about the panel's initial recommendation to add qualifying
condition to the medicinal marijuana program. No comments will be provided by members of the panel today. We will be scheduling another meeting to (1) further discuss our initial findings, especially in light of all public comments received; and (2) to vote on changes, if any, to our initial recommendation. That meeting will be scheduled following the Panel's review of today's transcript and all submitted written comments. Once a final determination is submitted to the Department of Health, the commissioners has up to 180 days to issue a final decision.

On July 21st, 2017 the Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel submitted its initial recommendation to Commissioner Bennett. The initial recommendation was based on the panel's review of 45 petitions to add qualifying conditions for purposes of participation in the Medicinal Marijuana Program.

In summary, the panel recommended that the Commissioner grant petition for chronic pain related to muscular disorder, migraine, anxiety, chronic pain and
visceral origin and Tourette's syndrome. The panel also recommended that the Commissioner deny petition for asthma and chronic fatigue syndrome.

On July 21, 2017 the panel's initial recommendation was posted on the department's website. The panel will be accepting public comments on its initial recommendation for a period of 60 days until September 25, 2017.

In the interest of making efficient use of the time for today's hearing, each speaker will be limited to three minutes. If you have longer written comments with you, please provide a copy to the panel and they will be added to the record.

Anyone interested in speaking today should sign in on the speaker sheet. Anyone who wishes to submit written comments after today's hearing is encouraged to do so. Such comments must be submitted no later than Monday, September 25th, 2017, and should be addressed to the Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel in care of the Department of Health at PO Box 360, Trenton, New Jersey 08625. The
contact information is also available on the
Department's website at WWW.
NJ.GOV/health/medicinalmarijuana. Your
comments are a very important part of this
process. And thank you.

Our guests are open for
comments. We have actually people who signed.
So first would be Ken Wolski. And he
represents CMMNJ.

KEN WOLSKI: Yes. Dr. Bekker
and members of the panel, my name is Ken
Wolski. And I'm a Registered Nurse and I'm
the Executive Director for the Coalition of
Medical Marijuana in New Jersey. I want to
thank the panel for its initial
recommendations -- initial approval of 43 --
45 petitions that coalition -- members of the
coalitions were involved in a number of those
petitions and we're very gratified to get the
kind of duniya suna fara (phonetic) efforts.
Our only concern now is the pace of the
program. It's over a year that the Department
of Health that's accepted these petitions for
consideration. And now it looks like the
department still has six months. So we would
urge the department to act expeditiously in
making its final recommendation and making
its approval of these conditions. Delays only
cause more suffering. Thank you very much.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: Thank
you. The next person is Jim Miller. He also
represents CMMNJ.

JIM MILLER: Yes, I'm
cofounder of the Coalition for Medical
Marijuana along with Ken. We founded it just
shortly after my former wife died from
multiple sclerosis. So I've been aware of
medical marijuana for the last -- since
1990-'91 with her.

I want to thank the panel for
-- well basically for doing your job. There
was some skepticism that there would be
resistance for some reason. And as I said to
Dr. Bekker earlier to recommend Tourette's
based on the factors that there is no
available help right now in any other way.
That's what doctors are supposed to do. So
kudos for that.

I'd like to also say that -- Dr.
Noah isn't here. Somebody voted "no" on
every recommendation when I was here before in the votings that were going on. And I don't even see how that's possible for somebody to say "no" to all these recommendations that you all supported. So I'm an old timer. I remember in the Olympics where -- when anything came to the scores like that, you throw out the lowest and throw out the highest, because East Germans always gave us low marks, you know? It's just the way it was. So consider the East Germans to throw out the lowest; throw out the highest. And what you got is you're unanimous for support for what patients already know to be true. If there was some way -- I can't urge you to act with all due haste, but my real problem is is you are the experts. And now this is going to someone who is a nonexpert to what, to validate, to correct your homework? What? It seems to me that your recommendations should be paramount. And I cannot believe that a lot of this is going on because legislatures listed the original list. Legislatures, not doctors. I mean how that happened in 2009, I don't know. But we owe
the patients an apology. And you've come closest to doing that by your heartfelt and clinical expertise.

So mostly I'm here to thank you, all except one guy who is not here. So thanks for everything.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: Thank you. So next speaker Amy Roth. And Amy Roth represents, I guess --

AMY ROTH: Hi, I have written something I want to go over.

I'm here today to advocate increased access for medical marijuana by increasing the number of dispensaries in the state, by adding satellite locations within the same region, and by permitting home, home cultivation.

Who am I? My name is Emy Roth. I reside in Union County, District 21. And I've been researching medical marijuana and have become completely engrossed and obsessed with the topic ever since I learned it became medically legal in New Jersey. So I began researching. I was reading possibly everything I can get my hands on, including
hundreds of articles and studies on the plant. I am privileged in working out of a dispensary where I furthered my research and education in the field. One common factor was the complaint on how far patients had to travel to purchase their meds. And to be honest, I think it's an outrage for it to take anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes or more in order to visit a dispensary. Patients would say: I traveled 40 miles. There's no way to get in my car. My disability check didn't come yet. I'm going to have to do this check again in a few days. In a way it's almost counteracting the working of the medicine because many patients cannot sit in a car for that length of time. And first of all for so often, and when -- and an example I thought of is what if you were looking for a house. You came to New Jersey. And the realtor said: Oh, the closest pharmacy is 30 miles away. Would you buy that house? Okay. 20 miles away; even 10 miles away. To allow someone live with contractible musculoskeletal spasticity, which generally causes pain equal to child birth, sitting in a car for -- to
sit in a car for more than a few minutes is -- can be actually mean. That's unconscionable.

Let's set the standard here for others. To date New Jersey has five operating dispensaries. In the summer the sixth one has been authorized to ground. This is clearly not even access. Everywhere there's a pharmacy there should be a dispensary. Existing dispensaries should have satellite locations just like pharmacies. There are well over -- I think it's -- 12,000 patients, approved patients with debilitating conditions that travel all over New Jersey -- hundreds of miles -- for very, very much needed legal medical plant food.

I'd like to see -- let's expand the dispensaries' ability to have locations near cancer centers.

I would appreciate another minute? Is that okay?

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: Yes.

Granted.

AMY ROTH: Thank you.

Let's widen the dispensaries' ability to have locations next to cancer
centers, doctors' offices, and nursing homes. For example, Summit Medical Group has partnered with M.D. Anderson and together are building a state-of-the-art complex here in New Jersey. And there should be a dispensary in close proximity for convenient access before or after treatment.

As for nursing homes, recent statistics also say the elderly usages weigh up while teen usage has declined. What we have today is barely accessible. It's difficult to know that we can be debilitated to the point where we want to throw in a towel, when we have this magical miraculous weed plant at our disposal. Yet making it so difficult to legally attain, it's almost ridiculous.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: You're welcome to submit your comments to the Department of Health.

AMY ROTH: Okay. I literally have 20 more seconds.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: Okay.

AMY ROTH: I'd like to see New Jersey be the model of the idea for the ideal
model for this country. We're in a great position increasing qualified physicians, increasing access and last but not least including homegrown. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'm very much more interested in further communication with you on this. So please please please please do the right thing for patients of New Jersey.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: Thank you, Mrs. Roth.

The next presenter speaker is Ms. Laura Carter. She presents WFWP. I'm not quite sure what it means, but go.

LAURA CARTER: Good morning. My name is Laura Carter. And I'm a United States Air Force Veteran and also the founder of a veteran medical cannabis support group; that's WFWP; that's Weed for Warriors Project. I founded that here in the city. I brought as a national program that I basically, you know, started here in Trenton a little less than a year ago.

I want to initially thank the Medicinal Marijuana Review Panel for giving initial approval to 43 of the 45 petitions
to expand the qualifying conditions for the program. As a veteran's advocate, the addition of anxiety, chronic pain, and especially opioid use disorder is critical in saving veterans' lives. As many of you know, we're -- the statistics are a little shaky but there's about 22 veterans every day that are dying. These veterans are suffering. The addition medical cannibis to this program will help save a lot of lives and end their suffering. Every day veterans are prescribed dangerous and highly addictive pharmaceutical drugs to treat service-related injuries and illnesses in 2016 the VA treated 66,000 vets for opioid addiction. The addition of chronic pain and opiate disorder in the New Jersey marijuana program will the another tool in the tool box of treating these patients. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs the opiate prescriptions increase for the VA patients by nearly 77 percent. So that's my recommendation. As someone that has a veteran medical marijuana support group, I see how the addition of VTSD has increased the livelihood
of these veterans and also it just ends their suffering. Medical marijuana helps to refocus, you know, the depression. And it helps, you know, get these -- get these patients out of a funk.

I would urge that the Department of Health and the Commissioner to please minimize the delay in adding these recommendations. Delays cause needless suffering and needless suffering causes suicide. So if we could please, you know, just do whatever we can to just -- you know, to minimize these delays, it will save a lot of people. So thank you.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: Thank you. Just one more time I want to emphasize that this panel has nothing to do with timing of this legislature process. We just recommend more people conditions in our role. So you may address a very valid point but it's not right to us.

LAURA CARTER: Yes.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: We have somebody else. We have more. So next would be Mr. George
Scmidvosky, Executive Director of Compassionate Sciences.

GEORGE SMIDVORSKY: Good morning, Panel. We submitted something in writing, but I, at the same time, I wanted to on behalf of the patient-base in the current program, there's probably 15,000 patients in the program now. And Compassionate Sciences services five thousand patients now in the program, but I can only convey on their behalf to urgently -- to recommend to Ms. Bennett to approve these qualifying conditions as soon as possible.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: Thank you for your comments. And I think the last comment is from Mr. Robert Kane. And he represents CMMNJ.

ROBERT KANE: Good morning. Robert Kane, New Jersey Medical Marijuana Petition: 013014028. I came up from Cape May County this morning specifically to thank the members for their volunteer mission for the medical cannibus expansion. I've submitted in writing as well a public study and verbal comment. I would just like to -- I know you
don't have anything to do with the speed of implementing these conditions, but I would like to implore commissioner Bennett to institute as soon as possible.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Kane. And I think we don't have any more petitioners.

(A discussion was held off the record.)

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: The meeting will be adjourned in a few minutes. We technically open to 11:00, but if there are no comments there is no reason to waste anybody's time. So we will wait right now for a few minutes and see if there is late arrivals -- things like that. And again, the process, it's not our purview. This is kind of different to address your concern to the Department of Health. So I guess you can sit in silence or whatever you'd like to do. Talk amongst yourselves.

(A recess was taken.)

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.d: We have another person who wants to present his case. And this is Mr. Illiayd Smith, please.
Hello.

ILLIAYD SMITH: Hello. All right.

I'm here today on behalf of -- not myself -- but other family members and friends.

One of my friends, she has fancy limb syndrome. I think that's what they call it. She had a tumor in her knee and they had to amputate it. And she has a lot of pain and stuff like that. She's not on the -- um -- on the spectrum to receive medical marijuana. She actually had it. My daughter, she had very bad menstrual pains when she has her period every month. And they say that's not on the list either -- things like that. I think it should be added to the list for medical marijuana. That's it.

ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: You can submit your comments in written form. It can be considered like a new Petition. You can say like for process, which starts with Petitioner justification and things like that. It's on the website. It's clearly delineated all these steps.

ILLIAYD SMITH: Okay. Okay. Thank you.
ALEX BEKKER, M.D., Ph.D: For five more minutes -- we will give a grace period for five minutes and then we will wrap it up.

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(Whereupon hearing concluded at 11:00 a.m.)
CERTIFICATE

I, ANGELA R. WATERS, CCR, DO HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing proceeding is a true and accurate transcript of my stenographic notes.

Angela R. Waters

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ANGELA R. WATERS, CCR, RPR