

Testimony in Support of Kansas SB 560
Dr. James K. McEntire, DO, FAAP
Kansas Senate Federal & State Affairs Committee
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Chairman Olson, Vice Chairman Hildebrand, Ranking Member Faust-Goudeau and members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today on Senate Bill 560, which is the bill to legalize medicinal marijuana in Kansas.

My name is Dr. James McEntire, and I am the 12th Missouri physician to receive approval from the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services to certify patients to legally purchase, possess and consume medical cannabis in Missouri. My medical clinic is Progressive Osteopathic Therapies and I provide certifications throughout Missouri. I am also a Kansas licensed physician.

Today I appear here because I am in a position to discuss with you how the Missouri system was initially set up and how it has evolved. I would like to present to you the key reasons why you should approve Senate Bill 560, which legalizes medical cannabis in Kansas.

My personal support for legalizing medical cannabis came before 66 percent of Missouri voters approved Amendment 2 to the state's constitution in November 2018. Why was medical cannabis a treatment of interest to me? As a parent of five, medical cannabis became of interest because one of my children was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Here in Kansas, autism spectrum disorders occur in between 2 and 2.9 percent of live births, and in 2020 there were 34,376 live births in Kansas, so between 675 and 1,000 children are likely to be diagnosed.

As you may have noticed here in the hearing room, one of my patients, US Army veteran, Jonathan Lewis, who was honorably discharged after 8 years of service, is here to record today's proceedings. I am authorized to disclose that he experiences a serious form of neurological pain known as phantom limb pain. Medical cannabis has been essential to manage his excruciating pain and allows him to engage in his film and video production business. Thank you for your service, Jonathan.

My association with Jonathan and other veterans is the first reason I encourage you to support SB 560: to aid our nation's military veterans. It's no secret that our treasured veterans experience higher suicide rates than non-veterans do. Many suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder. Veteran suicides occurred at a rate of 17.2 per day in 2019. And, in 2019, the adjusted suicide rate for Veterans was 52.3% greater than for non-veteran US adults.

In Missouri, between 10 and 20 percent of certified patients are military veterans. In fact, retail purchase of medical cannabis products is assessed a 4 percent sales tax. After the Department of Health and Senior Services uses up to 5 percent of total taxes collected, the balance goes to the Veterans' Health and Care Fund. The legalization of medical cannabis aids veterans and their families.

The second reason to support SB 560 is to open another line of attack against opioid addiction. Our country is overwhelmed by an opioid crisis. These medications have been pushed on veterans, women and young people. Prescription pain overdoses are an under-recognized and growing problem for women and while men have been more likely to die of prescription painkiller overdoses, the gap between men and women has been closing over the years.

More disturbing is the trend among young people. Opioid-related deaths continue to increase in the United States among adolescents and young adults (youth), as reported in the Journal of American Medical Association. Between 1999 and 2016, the opioid-related mortality rate increased 252% among 15–19 year olds. Similar to the adult population, the rise in deaths is driven by illicitly manufactured fentanyl, which is about 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. Emergency department visits and intensive care unit admissions related to opioid poisonings among youth have also increased.

Opioid addiction is deadly. More than 760,000 people have died since 1999 from a drug overdose. Two out of three drug overdose deaths in 2018 involved an opioid. It is clear that this bill is an important step to offer patients with another legitimate qualifying medical disorder: the chronic pain conditions that compel them to rely on opioids.

The Missouri law requires physicians to maintain patient medical records for seven years. All patients must have a legitimate qualifying medical disorder like PTSD, chronic pain conditions, autoimmune disorders, inflammatory conditions in order to receive the physician's certification.

All patients must renew their certification annually. Missouri has about 130,000 certified patients statewide. Some of those patients may be "double counted" as they were previously certified, did not renew the certification, and then reapplied. There are 6.16 million Missourians.

Finally, as policy makers, you know vaping poses a serious threat to young people. Safety is the third reason I support SB 560. Currently, on the black market and easily accessible here in the Midwest, people are vaping THC with an emulsifying agent that is dangerous and is a cause of popcorn lung, a fatal lung condition. Medical cannabis products come in a variety of forms for patients.

Thank you for listening to the reasons that SB 560 is an important bill to support. Serious medical conditions that Kansans seek treatment and help for can be aided by medical cannabis. Help Kansas veterans, chronic pain suffers and those whose safety is at risk from vaping black market substances. This is a well-thought out approach to offering medical cannabis in Kansas.