

## HB 316- Support

February 10 , 2020

Good Afternoon, Delegates, Committee Members and other members here for HB 316

My name is Barbara Schalk and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to explain the difficulties I experience every day as a chronic pain patients for over 20 years.

I am 56 years old with multiple diagnoses including facet syndrome, spinal stenosis, degenerative disc disease and many others including scoliosis. These conditions are a result of multiple automobile accidents and I have been searching for pain relief since I was 38 years old. I have tried many modalities including acupuncture, physical therapy, chiropractic care, massage therapy, warm water therapy , alpha stim and others. I have also tried CBD oil, Medical Marijuana, tens unit, miscellaneous topicals and patches, and other over the counter medications. All of these modalities have their place in my life at different times, as well as cognitive behavioral therapy and meditation. The therapy that allows me to live day to day and have some type of quality of life is opioid therapy. I am not an addict, but am dependent just as a diabetic is dependent on their medication for maintenance. If I do not have my pain medication, I am unable to get out of bed or off the couch.

It is very hard living with chronic pain and every day is a struggle. Due to the opioid hysteria, the pendulum has swung too far and created an almost unbearable existence. Every month I am in constant fear that somewhere along the line I will run into a problem getting my pain medication. In the past two years I have had 4 different pain management doctors; one was shut down by the DEA and another tried to force taper me off the medication without my consent. Doctors are also requiring we accept shots or other procedures in order to continue prescribing medication. Over the years I have also experienced problems with the pharmacy due to lack of supply or the pharmacist will not fill the prescription from a particular doctor. Also, I fear that the insurance company will decide they are no longer going to cover the medication and the out of pocket cost is more than I can afford on disability.

Over the years, there have been safeguards put in place to ensure these powerful medications are being given and taken by the community that needs them the most; the PDMP program, urine screens, contracts, etc. We now know that some of the prescriptions have been taken from medicine cabinets and gotten into the hands of drug seekers and those who are curious. Many of them our children who have lost their lives as they turned to the illegal market when they could no longer get prescription narcotics. This is an addiction problem, not a problem caused by chronic pain patients, but we have been targeted and vilified by the medical community, government agencies and the general public who think we are drug seekers. This stigma is degrading and anyone of us could be in this position. You are one accident, injury or disease away from needing pain relief that opioids provide.

There is a hopelessness among the chronic pain community and there are hundreds of groups that have organized online because we are in a fight for our lives. Hearing the constant heart wrenching stories of people's lives that are being decimated by involuntarily having their medications reduced to an unsustainable level or the very worst, taken from them without their consent. This ill and weak group is being further traumatized by their already dire situation trying to deal with chronic pain on daily basis. We are held hostage by our bodies. We are all human and subject to pain.

We are asking that the doctor/patient relationship be put back in the doctor's office instead of insurers and government making decisions for us because they do not have a medical license, nor do they have my medical history in order to make such decisions.

I support HB316 because currently, if the pharmacy is unable to fill my entire prescription, if I accept a lesser amount, the remainder is forfeited. If I chose to go to another pharmacy, I can be looked at as pharmacy shopping.

Sincerely,

Barbara Schalk