

Good Afternoon,

My name is Aaron Shepherd, and I am hoping that you will return a vote in favor of HB683/SB461. I was hoping to explain the importance of this bill, and why we must have it passed into law. HB683 is being heard in your committee on Tuesday 2/9/2021.

In 2002, I began a series of procedures on both of my knees. Although this may have been a work related injury, I could not pinpoint the exact time that my injuries occurred, so I did not submit a claim under Workers Compensation. One surgery led to another, which led to a total of seven surgeries over a four year timeframe. As you could imagine, during these years of treatment, I was taking pain medication, opioids in particular. My doctor was careless in treating me, and in the end, I was left addicted to the pills that I thought were helping me. To sum this up, after my knee procedures, I was heavily addicted to opioids, and my doctor stopped prescribing, which led me to the streets. I lost my wife, and custody of my daughter, which were my entire world. In 2006, it all came to an end, when my life also almost came to an end. One day I took too much, and did not wake up for almost fourteen hours. When I awoke, I knew I had to change everything. I tried detoxing cold turkey, but immediately became sick from the withdrawals. I had messed around with recreational cannabis in my teenage years, but remembered the benefits that I received, so I decided to give it a try to help my detox. Sure enough, this took away most of the sickness that I was feeling from the withdrawal, and also was helping with the pain that I still have to this day, from several knee surgeries.

As we all had a tough 2020, mine was in particularly tough. January 8<sup>th</sup> of 2020, I started out early in the morning on my job. I install security (alarm systems, cameras, and other low voltage) and was wiring up a house that was under construction. Not long into the day, I took that dreadful step that resulted in a ten foot fall directly onto my back. I was flown to Washington Medstar, where this journey began. I spent 3 days in intensive care, and two weeks in a regular hospital room. Although I was terrified of the helicopter ride, as it was my first on an extremely windy day, I was more afraid of what was to come. I knew that this was going to require me having to take medication for pain, which would be opioids. With my addiction behind me, it took several friends and family members to convince me that I had to take them, as I was laying there with a burst fracture in one vertebrae, and a compression fracture in another. The problem was, I have become a medical cannabis patient over the years to help my knee pain, but because I was receiving benefits through Workers Compensation, the only thing that was available to me was opioids. If you can imagine, I was absolutely terrified to go down that rabbit hole again.

I spent the entire year of 2020 at home recovering from my injuries, which led to a very serious surgery to fuse my spine together, just recently. Because of my history with opioids, thankfully I had the knowledge to get off the opioids as soon as I could. Just as soon as possible, I switched my pain management back over to medical cannabis, which is how I am treating my pain to this day.

Unfortunately because of the laws in place, this has put a huge burden on me financially, as I am having to spend roughly \$1200/month out of pocket, on medical cannabis. Because of this, I reached out to Delegate Valderrama and Senator Feldman seeking assistance, which is how this very needed bill came about. Although it may not help in my case, nobody should have to be put in that situation, when we have a much safer alternative. As you may know, nobody in the history of known data has ever died from overdosed on cannabis. Opioids do have there place, but I am living proof that medical cannabis has a larger place for long term ailments. I am begging you to please pass this bill so that nobody has to

suffer like I did, if they choose to use a legal, safe alternative. This bill if passed would be a very significant tool in fighting the opioid crisis, as most opioid addictions begin with an injury, and incompetent doctors. This is nothing new in this country, as six other states so far, have taken this important measure.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out. This bill must be passed if you want to help fight the opioid crisis.

Thank you,

Aaron Shepherd (240) 561-2332

TO HELP OTHERS, YOU LOSE NOTHING!