



September 20, 2019

H.R.712: VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2019
Endorsement from the Marijuana Policy Project

Dear Chair Takano, Ranking Member Roe, and members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs,

On behalf of the Marijuana Policy Project (MPP), the largest cannabis policy organization in the United States, I commend Rep. Correa and Rep. Higgins for introducing H.R.712, the *VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2019*. MPP has advocated for and advanced humane and sensible marijuana policies since 1995, playing a leading role in enacting most of the cannabis policy reforms of the past 15 years, and we strongly support this bipartisan legislation. Our nation's veterans deserve access to this treatment option, and MPP welcomes the research this bill would mandate to conduct a double-blind clinical study on the safety and efficacy of medical cannabis in treating veterans with chronic pain and, separately, in treating veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Cannabis' therapeutic effects in treating the symptoms of PTSD have garnered interest from the medical community, and the FDA has previously approved clinical trials to study it further. Unfortunately, there has been limited research on whole plant marijuana and PTSD due to federal obstruction. Because of this, most research regarding medical cannabis and PTSD has occurred outside of the U.S., including ongoing clinical trials in Israel. These trials have found that "medical cannabis was associated with a reduction in PTSD symptoms"¹ — quite promising results. These outcomes make expanding this type of research exceedingly timely, in addition to being crucial to our veterans' wellbeing.

Numerous studies have established that cannabis is an effective treatment for chronic pain, in addition to it often being significantly less dangerous than prescription medicines — both in terms of toxicity and addictive potential. In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published a study entitled *The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research*, which stated, "There is substantial evidence that cannabis is an effective treatment for chronic pain in adults." While prescription medicines and surgical procedures work for some patients, others' pain is resistant to treatment. It is incredibly important that the VA be given the ability to study medical cannabis' safety and efficacy through this lens.

Thank you for allowing MPP to offer its endorsement of H.R.712, the *VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2019*. If you have questions or need any additional information, I would be happy to help and can be reached at the email address below.

Sincerely,

Mandi Neff
Marijuana Policy Project
mneff@mpp.org

¹ Mashiah, Mordechai, "Medical Cannabis as Treatment for Chronic Combat PTSD: Promising Results in an Open Pilot Study," Abarbanel Mental Hospital, Israel, presented at Patients Out of Time Conference (2012).