



July 18, 2017

The Honorable Steve Cohen
2404 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Young
2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Cohen and Representative Young:

On behalf of the Epilepsy Foundation, I thank you for introducing the Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States (CARERS) Act, H.R. 1538, which would protect patients and physicians in states with medical cannabis programs and remove federal barriers to cannabis research.

The Epilepsy Foundation is the leading national voluntary health organization that speaks on behalf of more than 3 million Americans with epilepsy and seizures. We foster the wellbeing of children and adults affected by seizures through research programs, educational activities, advocacy, and direct services. Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Approximately 1 in 26 Americans will develop epilepsy at some point in their lifetime. There is no “one size fits all” treatment for epilepsy, and about one third of people living with epilepsy suffer from drug-resistant or intractable seizures. Many more live with significant side-effects, despite available treatments. This is why some people living with uncontrolled seizures turn to medical cannabis and cannabidiol (CBD) when other options have failed.

The Epilepsy Foundation is committed to supporting physician-directed care, and to exploring and advocating for all potential treatment options for epilepsy, including medical cannabis and CBD. People with uncontrolled seizures live with the continual risk of serious injuries and loss of life. If a patient and their health care providers feel that the potential benefits of medical cannabis and/or CBD outweigh the risks, then families need to have that legal option. Nothing should stand in the way of patients gaining access to this potentially lifesaving treatment.

Currently, the majority of states have enacted laws to authorize state-run medical cannabis programs. In states where medical use of cannabis is legal as a treatment option for epilepsy, a number of people living with epilepsy report beneficial effects, including a decrease in seizure activity. However, families using medical cannabis or CBD for seizure treatment are currently in violation of federal law, even if they live in states with medical cannabis programs. The CARERS Act would amend the Controlled Substance Act to allow states to establish their own medical cannabis policies. Thus, patients, providers, and businesses participating in state medical cannabis programs would no longer be in violation of federal law and vulnerable to federal prosecution.

While not everyone with epilepsy should or would consider medical cannabis and further research is needed, medical cannabis, when prescribed by a treating physician, may be the best alternative for some individuals living with drug-resistant epilepsy. The CARERS Act will make

it easier for researchers to gain federal approval for medical cannabis research. The bill will also increase the number of facilities that can legally grow medical cannabis for research. These bill provisions will expand our understanding of the possible benefits of medical cannabis for epilepsy and bring us closer to new treatments and a cure.

The Epilepsy Foundation thanks you for your leadership on this issue and engagement with the epilepsy community. We strongly support the CARERS Act and look forward to working with you to ensure safe, reliable, and legal access to medical cannabis and CBD for Americans living with epilepsy and uncontrolled seizures. Please reach out to Angela Ostrom, Chief Legal Officer and Vice President Public Policy, at aostrom@efa.org or 301-918-3776 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip M. Gattone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "G".

Philip M. Gattone, M.Ed.
President & CEO
Epilepsy Foundation