

TO: Honorable Members of the House State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committ

FROM: Amanda Bent, Policy Coordinator, Drug Policy Alliance

DATE: March 8, 2017

RE Support for SB17-017

Drug Policy Alliance strongly supports SB17-017 and urges you to vote yes on this important legislation to add post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorders to the list of debilitating medical conditions approved for using medical marijuana in Colorado. This legislation is grounded in the growing evidence and recognition that patients with stress disorders can benefit from access to medical marijuana. This bill would simply give patients in Colorado that option while:

- Allowing individuals suffering from PTSD to have honest conversations with their treating physician about how use of medical marijuana fits in a comprehensive treatment plan.
- Allowing veterans with PTSD to participate in a state-authorized medical marijuana program as required by the Veterans Administration.
- Allowing PTSD sufferers, many who live on military disability benefits and other fixed sources of income, to pay substantially less for medical marijuana and access strains that are unavailable in the retail marketplace.

You may be aware that even New Jersey, which has what is widely regarded as the strictest medical marijuana program in the country, has recently added PTSD to the list of qualifying conditions. Furthermore, SB17-017 was unanimously approved in the Senate State, Veterans, and Military Affairs committee and approved virtually unanimously in the full Senate with only a single dissenting vote. This tells us that providing this option to vulnerable patients is reasonable, compassionate and uncontroversial.

A growing body of research finds **medical marijuana effective for alleviating the symptoms of PTSD.**

- An Israeli pilot study found that within two months of administering medical marijuana, the **severity of participants' PTSD symptoms and emotional distress were reduced by approximately half** while improving work and social functioning.
- Several studies—including a randomized controlled trial, and an intensive case study—have found that **marijuana reduces the intensity of pain and improves sleep.**
- Additionally, **medical marijuana has also been empirically found to have positive effects on emotional processing and fear extinction.**

Medical marijuana also has potential as a **harm reduction tool in preventing dependence, toxicity and overdose with other medications.**

- Currently the U.S. FDA has approved two anti-depressants for the treatment of PTSD, namely Zoloft and Paxil, both of which have **limited efficacy, detrimental side effects** and produce remission in only about one-quarter of patients. Such medications have also been found to **double the risk of suicidal thinking and suicidal attempts in patients 24 years old or less, which includes a large percentage of our returning veterans.** Alternative medications, like benzodiazepines, antipsychotics and other antidepressants like Prozac also have undesirable side effects. **Medical cannabis, which has shown promise in alleviating PTSD, could be used to replace some of these pharmaceutical drugs, allowing those with PTSD to reduce or eliminate harmful side effects.**
- Furthermore, **off-label use of opioids is widespread among veterans diagnosed with PTSD, and use of these drugs can have significantly and potentially life threatening side effects and risks.**
- An *American Journal of Public Health* article published in the summer of 2016 also suggests that **medical marijuana access reduces opioid use and associated adverse outcomes.**

Those who can more effectively manage their PTSD symptoms without the use of opioids and other more dangerous medications should have the opportunity to do so. Their use of marijuana should be recognized as therapeutic and they should be granted the legitimacy afforded to other patients under Colorado's medical marijuana program.

Citation footnotes have been excluded here for the sake of brevity but I am happy to provide all source references for the above information at the request of the committee. Thank you for your consideration.