

2/8/2018

Representative Foster and Representative Seaton
Co-Chairs, House Finance Committee
Alaska House of Representatives

Re: Senate Bill 6 Industrial Hemp Production

Thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity to comment on SB6 and the issue of industrial hemp production in Alaska. I'd like to speak to one aspect of this legislation that directly affects my family.

My granddaughter will be three years old in May. When she was three months old she was diagnosed with a very rare form of epilepsy, known as Aicardi Syndrome. The long term prognosis for Aicardi kids is dire, to say the least. Most never gain any motor skills and spend their lives in a wheel chair. On the advice of her neurologists we started her on a series of anti-seizure medications; powerful drugs with very serious side effects.

After extensive research it became apparent to me that a non-psychoactive derivative from industrial hemp, cannabidiol, or CBD, was demonstrating to be as good or better than any of the prescribed pharmaceuticals at reducing and in many cases eliminating seizure activity, while having none of the terrible side effects routinely seen with conventional therapies.

When she was six months old we started giving her CBD every day in addition to the drugs prescribed by her doctors. At sixteen months, my granddaughter was still unable to lift herself to a sitting position, so we made a very difficult decision – we weaned her off of the drugs known to inhibit motor development and kept her on CBD for seizure control. About a month later, her life, and all of our lives, radically changed. One day she raised herself to a sitting position. A few weeks later she started turning around on the floor. A few more weeks and she was scooting around the room. Within a few months she was walking while holding on to objects and five months after the drugs were out of her system she was walking without assistance. She now goes to play sessions at the gym in Haines every week and runs, plays, and rides a tricycle with her peers. We have not witnessed any seizures in her twenty-six months of using CBD.

During my research I also became aware that tens of thousands of veterans across our country are using CBD to lessen the impact of PTSD and depression. It is primarily for this reason that Congressman Young became a founding Co-Chair of the Cannabis Caucus in the U.S. Congress a year ago. People with Parkinson's disease are using CBD to reduce tremors. People with debilitating arthritis are getting relief from CBD and in the last few years, we've seen a rapidly growing use of non-addictive CBD as a substitute for opioids by people suffering from chronic pain. All of these positive impacts have now been documented by clinical studies as well as anecdotal reports by people like me who have no reason to see or claim any benefit where none exists. Arguably the greatest proof of CBD's ability to address a host of neurological disorders is the fact that the pharmaceutical industry is scrambling to produce and market synthetic CBD.

CBD is one of more than 100 cannabinoids, a class of compounds produced by plants of the genus *Cannabis*. One of those cannabinoids, tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, is familiar to many people because of its psychoactive properties. As I mentioned earlier, CBD is not psychoactive and is not addictive. CBD can be derived from the stalks of industrial hemp, and is typically produced from plants that purposefully have virtually no THC because for many people, like those with epilepsy, THC can be harmful rather than beneficial.

My granddaughter will likely be taking CBD her whole life. She should be able to get CBD from producers in Alaska; an industrial hemp industry in Alaska will contribute huge benefits to society with no "side effects." Please pass this bill out of committee today so it can move through the remaining legislative process without delay.

Thank you very much for taking my testimony. I would be happy to speak with you or other members of the committee at any time about this matter.

Sincerely,

Gershon Cohen Ph.D.

Gershon Cohen PhD
Box 956 Haines, Alaska 99827
907-314-0228
gershon@aptalaska.net