

Shadow Hearing for HB 1534 Summary

Tuesday, 01 May 2007

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Tears, laughter and prayers all played a part in the Shadow Hearing for HB 1534, the affirmative defense medical marijuana bill, which was held on Monday evening April 30, 2007 in the State Capitol. The event was videotaped and we will have a link to that soon. But, until then, a brief summary of what transpired follows.

With almost 50 people in attendance the evening began with Noelle Davis, executive director of Texans for Medical Marijuana, explaining the reason we had gathered. The refusal of Representative Dianne Delisi to schedule a legislative hearing for HB 1534 before the public health committee made it imperative that patients and advocates have a space to tell their stories. Noelle pointed out that the posters placed behind her represented the public health committee members and their positions on HB 1534. Interestingly, the majority of the members were undecided, which means that if they would have had an opportunity to hear the testimonies and question the witnesses, they could have made up their minds. Prior to their testimonies, Reverend Landon Schultz set the stage by guiding us in prayer and affirming that sometimes confrontation is a necessary ingredient for change. Some tears spilled as a husband told of the tribulations he and his wife, a medical marijuana patient with chronic pain, have endured. "Though we love Texas, we are looking for other places to live where her quality of life can be improved without breaking the law," he said. Other compelling stories followed. Chris Cain, a 38-year-old quadriplegic, spoke of the severe muscle spasms he suffered from during his first years spent in a wheelchair. Fourteen years ago his doctor recommended medical marijuana and he has lived a healthy and generally pain free life since he said. "The most difficult problem I have now is fear of being arrested." An elderly couple, who identified themselves as Republicans, spoke of their prejudices against marijuana, until their paraplegic son informed them that marijuana tremendously reduced his spasms. As a result, they vowed to keep working until the state of Texas recognizes medical marijuana as an effective treatment. Tim, another medical marijuana patient who suffers from MS, challenged Rep. Delisi to come to his house and arrest him. "I have a constitutional right to sleep," he said, explaining how medical marijuana reduces his spasms so much that it enables him to sleep peacefully through the night. A retired psychiatrist said his wife, a retired psychiatric nursing supervisor, had tried medical marijuana to combat the nausea and anorexia she experienced due to chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. It helped for a while he said, but she discontinued its use because of respiratory problems. However, he stressed that medical marijuana is a viable option that shouldn't be denied. Russ Jones, a former DEA narcotics task force agent, said, "I can not help but remember the statement made by DEA's Chief Administrative Law Judge, Francis L. Young in 1988, who ruled that marijuana in its natural form, is one of the safest therapeutic active substances known." Continuing he said, "Judge Young went on to rule that it would be "unreasonable, arbitrary, and capricious for the DEA to continue to stand between those sufferers and the benefits of this substance." The evening ended with all participants holding hands as the Reverend guided the group with an ending prayer. The written testimonies of the witnesses and pre-written post cards signed by participants were delivered to Representative Delisi the next day.