

Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-861

Title: AN ACT WAIVING CERTAIN MEDICAL MARIJUANA FEES FOR VETERANS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/18/2021

File No.: 233

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently, the Department of Consumer Protection charges a fee to when it issues a registration certificate to qualifying patients for the palliative use of marijuana (aka medical marijuana). This bill seeks to waive those fees and exempt qualifying veterans, in an effort make medical marijuana programs more affordable and accessible to veterans.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Michelle Seagull, Commissioner, Department of Consumer Protection.](#) Commissioner Seagull submitted written testimony in support of the intent of the bill but stated some concerns. She noted that there are currently 49,000 certified patients in the Medical Marijuana Program and since the Department does not currently ask for veteran status, it would be difficult to estimate those numbers and determine the fiscal impact. In addition, if the legislation is enacted, the Drug Control Division would need to implement a tracking system to verify veteran status, which would require more logistical resources and add processing time to the application process.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Several speakers submitted written testimony in support of SB-861. They stated that this is an appropriate step to take for the men and women who have served, and that eliminating the fees from the Medical Marijuana Program allows for more accessibility and affordability and can create a better quality of life for veterans. In addition, the medical marijuana dispensaries estimate that about 5-6% of their patients qualify for veteran's discounts, representing a tiny fraction of the total medical marijuana fees collected by the state:

- [David Cappiello, Representative, Medical Marijuana Dispensaries](#)
- [Brian Essenter, Medical Marijuana Counselor, Medical Marijuana Consult CT](#)
- [Steve Jones, Resident, Tolland, CT](#)
- [Linda Kowalski, Connecticut Medical Cannabis Council](#)
- [Nathan Tinker, Secretary, Academy of Medical Marijuana Dispensaries, CEO, Connecticut Pharmacists Association](#)

[Steve Kennedy, CT Team Leader, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#) : Mr. Kennedy testified and submitted written testimony in support of SB-861. He stated that marijuana has shown to have therapeutic value for veterans with conditions like chronic pain and PTSD. He added that the federal department of Veterans Affairs physicians are prohibited from prescribing or discussing medical marijuana use, which forces veterans to go outside the VA Department to find private doctors to certify them for the Connecticut Medical Marijuana Program. Mr. Kennedy recommended that the committee consider what Illinois has done where instead requiring a non-VA physician signature on a certification, a VA diagnosis due to qualifying conditions is allowed in order to enter the program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Edward Jacome, Assistant Clerk Date: 03/26/21