

Submission
No 82

**INQUIRY INTO ROAD TRANSPORT AMENDMENT
(MEDICINAL CANNABIS-EXEMPTIONS FROM
OFFENCES) BILL 2021**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 25 April 2022

Partially
Confidential

To The Standing Committee on Law and Justice

RE: Road Transport Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis-Exemptions from Offences) Bill 2021

My name is _____ and I live in _____ New South Wales.

I'm not sure if you know many patients who have benefitted from medicinal cannabis, so I'm writing to share my personal experience with this treatment and highlight the negative consequences of the discriminatory laws surrounding the use of this medication.

My entire adult life I have suffered from debilitating anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These conditions have been identified by medical professionals because of childhood abuse and the resulting trauma. The symptoms of my diagnosis range from an inability to leave the house, panic attacks, insomnia, and persistent physical tremors; to name a few. As you can probably imagine, living with these symptoms makes it very difficult to work and hold onto employment, not to mention trying to improve and advance within a position. Over the past seven years, for example, I have had 12 different jobs, all these jobs were unskilled and physically taxing: housekeeping at hotels and factory production. These are the only positions I have been able to hold down for longer than a few months but gained no pleasure or job satisfaction in such roles and little opportunity for advancement. In any case, all these jobs have been unrelated to the area I would like to move into: being a TESOL teacher. To plan for this goal, I realised I needed to continue studying and discovered I couldn't study effectively while dealing with my symptoms. With the guidance of my GP, I started trialling medication.

My journey through pharmacological support started about seven years ago as a way of bringing my nervous system under control so that I could not only study but benefit from the weekly work I do with my psychologist. It has included several drugs that had horrific side effects and were ultimately ineffective in treating my physical and emotional symptoms. These medications all caused serious distress and an exacerbation of symptoms when tapering off. The trialled drugs included: Prozac, Valium, Inderal, Paxil, and Lyrica to name a few. I also pursued plenty of alternative treatments: Kava, reflexology, exercise therapy, meditation, yoga, and acupuncture, all of which had mild to little effect.

About two years ago, frustrated with the lack of improvement in my symptoms and my inability to concentrate effectively while studying, my GP and my psychologist recommended I apply for a trial of medicinal cannabis. After a few weeks of tweaking the dosage, I found that the symptoms of all my conditions noticeably and substantially improved in a way I never experienced with other medication. Also noteworthy, is that there are no side effects for me which is a game-changer. My experience of medicinal cannabis it is that it never makes me feel "intoxicated" like many of the other drugs did, rather, calms my over-active stress response system which usually feels as though it is on fire. This, in turn, has made it possible for me to return to study and to perform more effectively at work. To be clear, if anyone is impaired while driving, I believe they absolutely should be punished. I simply want the laws to be the same for cannabis as it is for other potentially impairing drugs - to have a defence for presence when the patient is not impaired.

The medication has helped so profoundly with my symptoms that in the last two years I have seen extraordinary improvements in my quality of life. For example, I am now able to be truly present with my psychologist during our sessions and “hold the work” in a way that has enabled me to utilise Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in a way I was never able to before because I am able to stay with the work without being overwhelmed by the emotions attached to horrific memories from childhood. In this short period, I have also been able to make huge, positive changes in my life. These include completing my Bachelor of Arts! I had given up on ever earning my degree because of the way my condition affects my ability to learn/concentrate (as any trauma expert understands- you can't learn if your system is flooded with cortisol). Last year, after struggling for eight years, I was finally able to graduate. I have also been able to not only hold down a job, but I have been able to perform at a level resulting in three promotions over that two-year period.

Not being able to drive has an incredibly negative impact on my ability to not only get to and from work: relying on public transport in my area adds about three hours to my working day in commuting time when I could drive there in twenty minutes. Recently, I was offered a substantial promotion in recognition of my hard work and contribution to the business, but unfortunately, was not able to accept this promotion as the position required me to drive a car and I cannot do that under the current laws. This has a negative effect on my earning potential and my sense of value and worth within the business.

As I continue working, I also have a plan to try for the CELTA certificate this year but am unable to drive to the education provider unless I cease taking the very medication that will assist in my ability to undertake such a rigorous and intensive course. Ultimately, I would dearly love to utilise lived experience to specialise in assisting adults with their English and literacy skills which would require my earning a Masters in Applied Linguistics, but I know that, at this stage, I can only do so with the support of this medication.

The clear extrapolation is that the current laws are discriminating against medicinal cannabis patients like me. As far as I know, medicinal cannabis is the only prescribed medication where you lose your licence if you test positive for presence, not impairment, of the drug (THC) in the system. I could take opiates or benzodiazepines, test positive and drive away if I showed my prescription and I can tell you that those medications affect the ability to drive far more than Medicinal Cannabis. To my mind this is not logical or fair- it's putting vulnerable, already disadvantaged, medical patients in more of a disadvantaged position.

I implore you to take interest in these laws and the science that informs the debate and determine whether you want to support the current laws or help to provide the equal rights that will help patients like me achieve their goals and contribute to our society in a meaningful and inclusive way.

As a legal medicinal cannabis patient, the pace of action in this area is of increasing concern for me personally for the reasons outlined above. Currently, I'm not seen as equal in the eyes of the law and taking my medicine puts me at risk of losing my license when driving unimpaired. Your serious attention to this issue is essential for community members (like me) who rely on this medication.