

Legislation Text

File #: 160543, **Version:** 0

Requesting that the Governor and the Pennsylvania State Legislature Amend the Medical Marijuana Act to Allow Doctors to Prescribe Medical Marijuana as a Direct Alternative to Opioid Painkillers.

WHEREAS, In April 2016, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law Act 16 (“the Medical Marijuana Act”). This legislation allows the use of medical marijuana under specified conditions; and

WHEREAS, The Medical Marijuana Act specifies which medical conditions qualify for prescription of medical marijuana by doctors. These conditions include cancer, HIV/AIDS, and multiple sclerosis. Medical marijuana is not allowed to treat or manage pain unless it is determined that severe chronic and intractable pain cannot be treated by opioid medications; and

WHEREAS, Today, doctors most often prescribe opioid painkillers to patients with non-chronic pain. These medications have proven to be addictive and dangerous. 6.5 million Americans abuse prescription drugs, especially opioid painkillers; more Americans abuse prescription drugs than abuse cocaine, heroin, and hallucinogens combined. Furthermore, opioid addiction can lead to even more harmful addictions; 8 in 10 heroin users started by abusing prescription opioids. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of injury-related death in the country. Pennsylvania has the 9th-highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the country, and in 2015, 693 people died of a drug overdose in Philadelphia County. The majority of these deaths were traced to heroin and opioid abuse; and

WHEREAS, A 2014 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that states with medical marijuana laws averaged a 24.8% lower annual opioid overdose mortality rate between 1999 and 2010 than states without medical marijuana laws. The study concluded, “Medical cannabis laws are associated with significantly lower state-level opioid overdose mortality rates. Further investigation is required to determine how medical cannabis laws may interact with policies aimed at preventing opioid analgesic overdose”; and

WHEREAS, While opioid abuse has proven fatal, marijuana has not been cited as the primary cause of death in any recorded case in the United States to date. A 2006 *American Scientist* report stated, “smoking or eating marijuana might require something like 1,000 times the usual dose to cause death”; and

WHEREAS, In an article for *Psychology Today*, J. Wesley Boyd, M.D., Ph.D. of Harvard Medical School wrote, “Although there usually are some subtle physiological signs of withdrawal when a chronic user [of marijuana] stops smoking—mildly elevated pulse, irritability, and so on—these physical effects are generally fairly mild, and they are dramatically less obvious or powerful than those seen when a habitual user of alcohol, opiates (either heroin or any of the opioid pain pills), or benzodiazepines... abruptly ceases use”; and

WHEREAS, Research suggests that medical marijuana is a suitable and safer alternative to opioid painkillers. It should be seriously considered as an equal prescription option at a time in which fatal doses caused by overdoses on opioid painkillers are on the rise. Doctors in Pennsylvania should have the ability to consult with their patients and make decisions to prescribe medical marijuana due to concerns about the safety of opioid

medications; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby request that the Governor and the Pennsylvania State Legislature allow doctors to prescribe medical marijuana as a direct alternative to opioid painkillers.