

Testimony before the Georgia Commission on Medical Cannabis

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Georgia State Capitol
Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Room 606
206 Washington St SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

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As a way of background, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I have been married for over 37 years. I have four children and five grandchildren. I was born and raised in Georgia. I have been a Georgia Baptist pastor for over 31 years. As a pastor, I have spent a lot of time in hospitals and ministering to many people with varying illnesses. I have conducted so many funerals that I have lost count of the number. I have been with folks in our congregation when they were diagnosed with a terminal illness, and I have held their hand when they went to be with the Lord.

For eight years I represented Georgia Right to Life as their Legislative Director. Now I am in my second year representing the Georgia Baptist Convention, with its 1.4 million Baptists and almost 3,600 churches. In this capacity, I have attended the hearings on the legalization of medical marijuana. I have also attended some of the press conferences and met many of the parents who have lobbied to get the treatment they believed best for their children. I have heard many testimonies and prayed with a troubled mother who was desperate for help in treating the suffering of her child.

I want to thank Rep. Allen Peake and those legislators who have worked tirelessly to find ways to legally and effectively treat Georgia citizens who battle severe medical illnesses. And not enough can be said for the love and dedication of parents and others who are doing everything in their power to find the most effective medical treatment for their family and friends.

Having observed first hand many sincere people fighting for the legalization of medical marijuana, it would be hard for me to believe that these families are doing what they are doing because their ultimate goal is to make recreational marijuana legal. Furthermore, I think that it would be wrong and a gross mischaracterization to say that just because someone is in favor of medical marijuana that they are also in favor of the legalization of recreational marijuana. However, on the other hand I also believe that it is a gross mischaracterization to say that if someone is against the legalization of drugs not approved by the Food and Drug Administration or the cultivation of an illegal plant like marijuana that they are against children and adults seeking help in dealing with their pain and suffering.

It has been stated over and over again by some legislators supporting medical marijuana that the furthest thing from their minds is the legalization of recreational marijuana. And furthermore, these same legislators promise to do everything in their power to never see recreational marijuana come to Georgia. What this tells me is that there are legislators who believe marijuana is an extremely dangerous drug to put into the hands of the general public. This also

tells me that many legislators are aware that the legalization of medical marijuana has always preceded the justification of recreational use.

This is specifically the concern of the Georgia Baptist Convention when it comes to the cultivation of marijuana in our state. At this present time the Georgia Baptist Convention has not taken an official position for or against the use of medical marijuana for certain medical conditions. Although, during hearings in the Senate, we did speak in favor of clinical trials where patients would be closely monitored to insure the safest results.

However, last month at our annual convention meeting the Georgia Baptists unanimously passed a resolution entitled, "The Dangers of Marijuana." The resolution stated our opposition to not only the sale and use of recreational marijuana, but also our opposition to the cultivation of the plant in Georgia. That is what I am here to call your attention to today.

The resolution states: "THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we urge the members of the Georgia Legislature to oppose any legislation that would authorize the cultivation of marijuana in the State of Georgia; ..."

We recognize the difficult position the legislature is in when it has legalized a substance that it cannot grow itself. However, there comes a time when the unintended consequences outweigh the intended ones. We feel that this time has come.

I think all of us have become very leery of government making promises that it either does not intend to keep or cannot keep. I accept the word of those legislators who say the legalization of recreational marijuana is not their intent for Georgia. However, legislators cannot promise that they will always be in office. These incremental steps of medical legalization have been used by recreational proponents to push an agenda that has nothing to do with the wishes of the parents here today.

I think it is wise for all of us to be careful that we not get so close to the forest that we cannot see the trees. Cultivation of marijuana in our state, even for medical purposes, pushes us to a line that will be impossible to maintain.

The Bible tells us in I Corinthians 10:23-24 (ESV), "*All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*" When I think about this passage I am reminded that in determining government policy it is not just about how one group of citizens can be impacted by legislation that is important, but how could it potentially affect all citizens one day. The consequences of allowing marijuana to be grown in Georgia does create a difficult law enforcement challenge and it does put the state a step closer to the legalization of recreational use. For the sake of **all** our children and families in Georgia, this is a risk too great!