

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on  
“Researching the Potential Medical Benefits and Risks of Marijuana”  
July 13, 2016**

The way that individual States are addressing marijuana continues to evolve. Over the past couple of decades, many states across the country, including Vermont, have passed laws that allow marijuana to be prescribed for medical treatment. As a result, Vermonters and many other Americans who suffer from diseases like multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, cancer, and AIDS have access to medical marijuana to treat these debilitating conditions.

Yet evidence based research of medical marijuana has been hard to come by. As more States allow doctors to prescribe marijuana for medical reasons, it is essential that we remove outdated and arbitrary restrictions that limit scientific research into the potential benefits and risks of marijuana treatments. These restrictions have no basis in medicine, and they only serve to prevent patients and their doctors from fully understanding the safety and efficacy of these treatments.

As Chairman of Judiciary Committee last Congress, I convened a hearing on the tension between Federal and State laws after Colorado and Washington voted to legalize recreational use of marijuana. At the time of that hearing, dozens of states had legalized medical marijuana and some had decriminalized possession of small amounts of marijuana. Concerned about the conflicts between Federal controlled substance laws and certain states’ marijuana laws, I successfully pressed the Justice Department to release guidance on this issue which limits Federal law enforcement’s interference with responsible, state-sanctioned marijuana programs. It is clear the limited enforcement resources of the Drug Enforcement Administration are better used to combat dangerous drug traffickers rather than interfering with state compliant marijuana programs.

As we have seen with the epidemic of opioid abuse, it is important that we not only investigate the potential medical benefits of marijuana but properly understand any potential risks from its use. I look forward to learning from today’s witnesses about the existing barriers to research into the potential medical applications of marijuana caused by its status as a Schedule I substance. We must have a smarter approach to marijuana policy, which can only be reached with close cooperation and mutual respect between the Federal governments and the States.

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