

**Remarks for Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Senate Drug Caucus Hearing on Medical Marijuana
Wednesday, June 24, 2015**

Remarks

Thank you, Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein, for holding this important hearing today, and for inviting me to participate.

I first came to the issue of medical marijuana when parents of children suffering from seizure disorders began to contact my office for help in accessing a strain of cannabis known as CBD.

As we'll hear today, CBD can reduce the number of seizures patients experience. The benefits are dramatic: children's brains and bodies can develop, they can learn, they can play. They can be kids.

I'll speak more about the families I've met in a moment, and I also want to note that CBD is just one strain of cannabis that has medical benefits for a variety of illnesses affecting our constituents.

I have submitted added testimony today that, while outside of the scope of today's hearing, is important in our consideration of medical marijuana reform. I appreciate the Caucus' consideration of that testimony.

Over the last few months, I have met with many families from across New York and the nation, who desperately need access to medical marijuana.

These are mothers and fathers whose children are suffering every single day from diseases like Dravet Syndrome and epilepsy.

These are young boys and girls who have hundreds of seizures a day. Their development is delayed because they experience so many seizures.

But while doctors advise that CBD would alleviate the number of seizures, parents risk violating federal law to administer the medicine prescribed, and can face arrest, and the loss of custody.

I am a parent. I have two young boys. I know many of you in this caucus are parents.

I simply cannot imagine the pain and frustration that these families endure when confronted with this choice.

Earlier this year, we received a letter from a mother named Missy, whose son, Oliver, suffers from a seizure disorder. I want to share with you her experience.

She wrote:

“Oliver had a trip planned for a long time to perform at Disney World with his school percussion group! It was supposed to be one of the highlights of his life!

“But as is our life with refractory seizures, he has been seizing and sedated from all the rescue meds this whole trip. It is heartbreaking for me to watch this endless torture.

“The last time we were here at Disney World, Oliver could still walk. He could sit up in rides, he could enjoy being in the pool.

“That was 2 years ago. This is what the seizures have taken from him in 2 years. This trip, he can no longer walk, he can’t sit unsupported in any ride, he could not tolerate the pool, he seized through his favorite ride.

“Please remember and represent him and the so many others like him.”

This mother, and the thousands of other parents just like her are simply asking Congress to do its job – to take care of America’s families by letting DOCTORS determine what their patients need.

State lawmakers across the country have already recognized what the medical community is telling us: that cannabis can treat a variety of illnesses, from MS to cancer, to epilepsy, to seizures. 23 states, plus Washington DC, have already passed laws to legalize medical marijuana.

But none of that matters because our outdated federal laws preempt any of the state laws.

The recognition that the regulations are behind the science is growing here in Washington.

Committees in both the House and the Senate have passed amendments to expand access to medical marijuana.

And just this week, the White House proposed a new rule to lift a long-standing obstacle to medical marijuana research.

But until we change our federal laws, doctors can’t prescribe this medicine to children who need it...even in states where it is legal.

Until we change the federal laws, scientists will still face barriers to researching medical marijuana and the most effective way to use it...even in states where it is legal.

Until we change the federal laws, parents like Missy are stuck watching their children suffer through hundreds of seizures a day...even in states where medical marijuana is legal.

Let's do our jobs. Let's pass a new, modern law on medical marijuana that respects state laws, that respects modern scientific research, and that respects our families.

Thank you.