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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

October 26, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
 Secretary
 Department of Veterans Affairs
 810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
 Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

In 1925, Congress established the Veterans Health Administration Office of Research and Development (ORD), in order to facilitate the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) fulfillment of its research and development program's mission "to discover knowledge and create innovations that advance health care for Veterans and the Nation."ⁱ This letter is a request for ORD to fulfill its stated mission by conducting and examining research on medical marijuana's effects on veterans suffering from chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

According to a 2014 report by VA's Office of Inspector General (VAOIG), in 2012, opioid based treatments were provided to 7.7 percent of VA's patient population, and of VA's patient population prescribed opioids for the treatment of chronic pain, 1 out of every 5 patients had been diagnosed with PTSD. VAOIG also found approximately 13 percent of veterans prescribed opioids have formed an addiction to the drug.ⁱⁱ As a response to the opioid epidemic, Congress passed The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) which directed VHA to continue its efforts to reduce VHA reliance on opioid medication for pain management by implementing safer prescribing and monitoring practices. In July of 2017, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a roundtable to discuss the impact of CARA on the veteran population and whether VHA's resulting actions were sufficient to reduce opioid reliance and addiction. Attendees of that roundtable, including Members of Congress and representatives from Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), expressed concerns regarding veterans' lack of access to alternatives to opioid-based treatments such as complementary and alternative medicine including medical marijuana and its cannabinoids.

VA is uniquely situated to pursue research on the impact of medical marijuana on veterans suffering from chronic pain and PTSD given its access to world class researchers, the population it serves, and its history of overseeing and producing research resulting in cutting-edge medical treatments. Currently, 26 states and the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico offer access to medical marijuana for those with physician recommendations. While data is limited, it has been reported that an estimated 9% of the veteran population currently use marijuana and 41% of those veteran users reported having used marijuana medically. This is more than double

the percentage of civilians using marijuana for medicinal purposes.ⁱⁱⁱ VA's pursuit of research into the impact of medical marijuana on the treatment of veterans diagnosed with PTSD who are also experiencing chronic pain is integral to the advancement of health care for veterans and the Nation

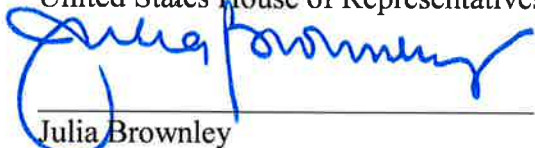
We ask VA to respond, in kind, with a commitment to the development of VHA-led research into this issue. If VA is unable to make this commitment, we ask VA to outline any and all external and internal barriers to the pursuit of the research to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs by November 14th, 2017.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, if you have any questions please email Megan Bland at megan.bland@mail.house.gov.

Thank you,



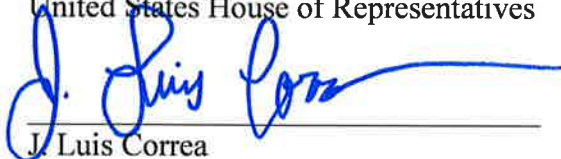
Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives



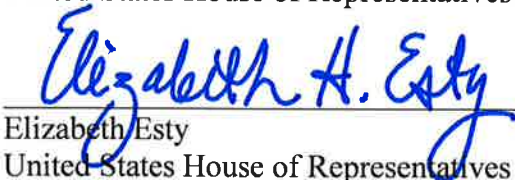
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United States House of Representatives



Beto O'Rourke
United States House of Representatives



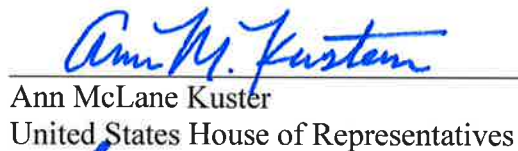
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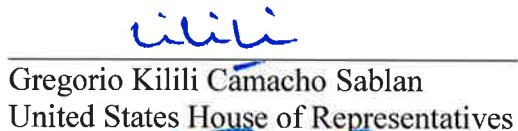
Mark Takano
United States House of Representatives



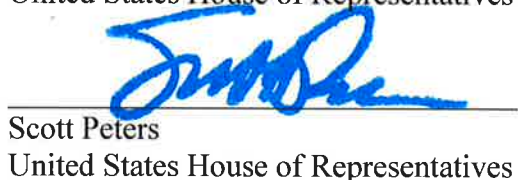
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ⁱ Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, *Research and Development Program*, VHA DIRECTIVE 1200, May 13, 2016, p.1.

ⁱⁱ Office of Healthcare Inspections, Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Healthcare Inspection – VA Patterns of Dispensing Take-Home Opioids and Monitoring Patients on Opioid Therapy*, May 14, 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ Davis, Lin, Ilgen, and Bohnert (2017). Recent cannabis use among Veterans in the United States: Results from a national sample. *Addictive Behaviors*, Abstract retrieved from ScienceDirect Abstract database.