

Good afternoon,

My name is Marcus Harcus, I am a family man, writer, organizer, and social entrepreneur from North MPLS. I'm also the director of the MN CFL. For the past 7 years, I have studied the history of prohibition and the emerging legal Cannabis industry. When I was 20 years old, I began smoking herb as a safer alternative to alcohol and to treat my post-traumatic stress from being excessively harassed by police in my youth and twenties, despite my never having been a criminal. I've been pulled over 70 times by police, racially profiled 50 of those times, in vehicles and on foot. I was once violently brutalized by Minneapolis cops for walking along the curb in the street during a blizzard. I once experienced being berated and sexually assaulted by a vicious female U of M cop who caught me and a woman peacefully smoking by the Mississippi river. As a Black man and a Cannabis consumer for the past 22 years, I know that too many police officers are corruptly addicted to the War on Drugs. Thousands of veterans have been victims of the Drug War, including those like Jeremy who were discharged from military service over consumption of Cannabis, a healing plant with no lethal dose. The most dangerous thing about Cannabis is getting caught with it because you can lose your freedom, lose your job, lose your housing, and even lose custody rights of your children.

We all know about the prevalence of PTSD among U.S. military veterans and the tragic fact that 22 veterans die by suicide every day in America because of it. Because of prohibition, veterans are not free to consume Cannabis without risking their careers during active-duty, or their Veterans Administration benefits in retirement. Dozens of Minnesotan veterans have shared their testimonies with me of how THC has been the only substance to effectively treat their PTSD, including a good friend of mine who is a successful, widely respected public figure whose biggest secret is that smoking herb every night after work helps him relax, enjoy private fellowship, and endure his haunting trauma to help him sleep. As the grandson of two foreign war veterans who returned home with PTSD and became alcoholics and tobacco smokers, I've often wondered if Cannabis had been legal and safely accessible then, if my grandfathers could have lived longer, healthier lives. Ironically, Cannabis is an Exit Drug, not a so-called "Gateway Drug." We know that many veterans, like my famous friend, are thriving today partly because Cannabis has helped increase the peace in their troubled minds and hearts, as it has with so many civilians. Soldiers are men and women willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for our country. This is supposed to be a free country they defend, not a police state that disenfranchises us.

Please pass HF 600 for the hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans who simply want to live without the risk of being criminalized over this healing plant that safely makes us feel better. There is not a single reason to justify prohibition, especially because it has failed to stop the thriving illicit market and because it ruins thousands of lives annually in our state. The imperatives for full legalization include respecting personal freedom, increasing public safety, improving public health, creating economic development, and advancing social justice and racial equity. Prohibition is the problem, not Cannabis. Legalize it, Minnesota!

Thank you!