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DATE 3/16/11  
NO. HB 161

## Patient Letters

Several patients from all over the state have asked me to bring letters to Helena for them, as many are too sick or poor to make the trip. The first is mine. Thank you for taking your time to read them.

Monica Blanchard

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I am a 38 year old wife and mother, and a caregiver and patient in the medical cannabis program. I currently provide for 15 clients.

My neck was severely injured on a trampoline at age 6. Because of this, I have a traumatic spinal cord injury, resulting in permanent numbness, compromised balance, and chronic pain. I have lived with the pain since my mid teens. I am confused when a patient's youth is trotted out as some sort of "proof" that the patient can't possibly qualify for medical cannabis (MedCan). Please stop listening to this ridiculous false logic. I have a friend that suffers with Crohn's and has been symptomatic since she was 20. My husband has broken 16 bones, some more than once, and has suffered severe pain since his early 20's. Out of my hundreds of friends and acquaintances, I can only think of a small handful who didn't start suffering, at the very latest, in their mid 20's. We live in Montana, land of skiing, rock climbing, mountain biking, and a million other ways to break yourself. Why wouldn't a large percentage of our young people hurt?

It is of the utmost importance that revisions of the state law include language to protect patients. Many towns are enacting ordinances that restrict patients too severely. For instance, some are trying to prohibit patients from ingesting their medicine in public. This is not a workable option. If a patient is in pain, or experiencing a seizure, they are prohibited from ingesting immediately in many towns across Montana. This is at best miserable and at worst dangerous. Would you tell an asthmatic not to use their inhaler in public? A diabetic not to give themselves an injection? They have to suffer until they're in the confines of their private homes, if they even make it that far? This may seem like an exaggeration to someone who doesn't understand the individual situations of MedCan patients, but I assure you this is a serious, potentially life threatening issue. This is not in keeping with the spirit of the people's vote that made this drug available to the sick to alleviate their suffering.

It's imperative that the lack of available doctors participating in the program be addressed. My neurosurgeon walked out of the room and shut the door in my face when I brought up the subject of cannabis. My husband went to 5 doctors before the 6<sup>th</sup> would recommend, paying for an office visit each time. We are most assuredly qualifying patients, he with his 16 broken bones and a shoulder so separated that it would fall out of socket several times a day; myself w/ 4 vertebrae fused in my neck, spinal cord damage, chronic pain and numbness. Many doctors just won't even consider cannabis an option. Each time a patient is forced to go to another doctor, the cost compounds for them, not only in dollars, but in time, waiting, traveling and suffering. For some, the time spent looking and waiting can mean a life shortened or lost. This created the monster we call the "doctor circuses". It is unacceptable that the doctors participating in these are spending so little time with each patient, no follow up, etc. However, isn't this a matter to take up with the medical boards? A lack of doctors willing to have the MedCan conversation caused this problem. Fix that and doctor circuses will disappear. Have too many MedCan cards been issued? According to the American Academy of Pain Management, approximately 1/5 of the population of the entire country complain that chronic pain is a major issue in their lives, affecting their work performance, sleep, happiness, etc. If 1/5 of the total population of Montana is holding a MedCan card, that seems to be statistically feasible.

Business should be regulated and licensed, and this one is no exception. This helps assure the public that when you buy someone's services, whether it's to get your hair cut or a surgical procedure, the person performing the task has been through some sort of training and can be considered a professional in their field. As a cg, I've had hundreds of conversations with patients dissatisfied with the "care" they've received. This shows a desperate need for some sort of regulation in our industry. My concern is that the proposed regulations be commonsense based and not prohibitively difficult. All decisions should be made w/ the participation of industry members who can provide help and advice based on everyday experience. Only this way can we create a Medical Cannabis program that satisfies the original intent of the majority vote that brought us here in the first place. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Monica Blanchard

To Whom It May Concern:

I wasn't born in Montana but I've lived here for nearly a decade and spent the most formative years of my life in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley. I'm writing this today because I represent a minority group that's voice isn't being heard enough; I am a medical marijuana patient. Not only that, I'm one of the medical marijuana patients in Montana that is so often attacked by the misinformed. I am 18 years old and was prescribed medical marijuana by a state licensed physician to treat my chronic pain, more specifically, my migraines.

Anyone who's ever experienced a migraine knows first hand how debilitating and painful migraines can be. For the last few years I've been plagued with migraines on almost a weekly basis, which greatly interfered with both my school life and my working life. Were it not for medical marijuana, I would still be in a great deal of discomfort and wouldn't be nearly as productive as I am now.

Since I was twelve years old I've had to deal with a myriad of different prescription pills, hospital visits, CAT scans and other treatments for my migraines until I discovered medicinal marijuana. Since I was prescribed M.M. in April of 2010, not only have my medical bills been significantly reduced, my pain has been as well.

I need marijuana. Three words that to some seem inappropriate, three words that to others seem essential. Please support medical marijuana in Montana! This state needs it as much as the patients themselves do.

Sam Mendoza

I am a 50 yr. old female disabled veteran receiving VA disability and have been on Social Security Disability since the age of 37.. I am a medical marijuana patient strongly opposing HB 161 for the following reasons.

I have Anticardiolipin Antibody Immune Deficiency Syndrome (very poor immune system), Scleroderma (fatal with no cure), Grave's Disease (to include exophthalmos), Scoliosis, Degenerative Disc Disease, chronic pain, arthritis, bursitis, insomnia and a host of other minor ailments. I am 5'6" tall and weigh a mere 113 lbs.

Since being prescribed marijuana I have been able to cut four prescriptions from my regimen of 21 prescriptions a day.

Marijuana helps with the scleroderma mostly by helping me to relax many of the muscles and stiffness along with the fact it helps me keep my mind off of facing a fatal disease.

Marijuana helps with the Grave's Disease because it helps to decrease the pressure behind my eyes. Due to pressure behind my eyes I have had to endure 20 hours of surgery so the marijuana is really a benefit with this. I've been able to cut one prescription of eye drops and now require only half of another.

Marijuana has been a gift with the amount of pain I have all day, every day. Marijuana does not make the pain go away but gives me the freedom to not focus on it so much.

Marijuana should be a must for people with insomnia. I use to take a full sleeping pill every night at bedtime but have cut back to half nightly and with a little marijuana I am able to get a good night's sleep.

Marijuana helps my appetite which a plus being as thin as I am.

Being prescribed and receiving marijuana from my caregiver has made a very big change in my life and I STRONGLY OPPOSE HB 161.

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February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011

To whom it does concern,

My name is Seth A. McGhee. I grew up in Montana. In 1997, I graduated high school in Absarokee, Montana. In 1995, I began my sixteen-year ongoing career in health care. At sixteen-years-old, I was offered a job as a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) for a small hospice house in Absarokee, (no longer there) called Brookside Manor. The owners were Jim and Julie Gallagher. I fell in love with helping people who truly needed help.

I came to Missoula in 1997 to go to college at the University of Montana as a music education major. I began working immediately for Nightingale Nursing as a PCA, as well as being a full-time student.

In 1999, I became a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) through St. Luke Hospital in Ronan, MT. John Overbaugh was the assistant Director of Nursing at St. Luke's. John taught the CNA class, as well as paid for my entire cost of the class. John even let me stay at his house in Evaro, MT for the week long training. John is still a very close friend of mine. Four years ago I was blessed to care for John's mother and father at the end of their life in their home. I considered that a great honor.

I have worked for several health care agencies in Missoula. I worked for Community Medical Center as a CNA in the Medical/Surgical unit from 2008 to 2009. As I stated earlier, I have been a health care provider for over sixteen years. Although I no longer work in a hospital/nursing home/hospice setting, I still work as a CNA. I just prefer to work "in home". The personal setting is where I feel most effective.

For many years, I have heard people tell me, "You really should be a nurse. You would make a great nurse." The only difference between what I have done for sixteen years and what nurses do, is administer medications. I have NEVER wanted to be the one who mainly goes around the hospital administering the staggering amount of medications that doctors prescribe. No thanks. I'd rather do things that truly help people, not kill people. I have seen many people die, too many, actually. I have taken care of them. I have watched too many people suffer horrible deaths because of horrible prescription drugs. These deaths could have been less horrible or even avoided all together with medical cannabis.

I have seen with my own two eyes the devastating effects of man-made prescription drugs. Oxycodone (Percocet), and morphine are two that are killers, let alone the wide arrange of side effects and addictions that these drugs cause, leading doctors to prescribe a plethora of other drugs to counteract the effects of those two alone.

Here are some of the side effects of Oxycodone –

Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, constipation, dry mouth, lightheadedness, drowsiness, Flushing, sweating, itching, weakness, headache, mood changes, decrease in pupil (dark circle in eye) size, red eyes.

**Here are some more serious side-effects –**

Fast or slow heartbeat, difficulty Breathing, slowed breathing, hives, rash, swelling of the face, throat, tongue, lips, eyes, hands, Feet, ankles, or lower legs, hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, hallucinating (seeing things or Hearing voices that do not exist), seizures, confusion, fainting, dizziness, loss of consciousness. Morphine causes the same side effects.

As you can obviously see, doctors prescribe so many other medications to counteract these side effects. I have seen people taking up to 60 pills a day! Why do we say that this is okay? We're killing people with these drugs. Trust me. I've seen it for years. Numerous studies and medical reports prove that these drugs, and the sheer number of prescription drugs on the market today are making people addicts, making people more sick then they were before taking the drugs, and even killing people.

Cannabis, or as the Mexican's call it – Marijuana, HAS NEVER killed anyone, HAS NO physical

addictive properties, and is IMPOSSIBLE to overdose on. In order to overdose, someone would have to consume approximately 5 ½ times their own body weight at one time – impossible. I weigh 190 lbs. I would have to consume 1,045 lbs. of cannabis to overdose.

Cannabis has been used for over 8,000 years. Our forefathers, who founded our country, knew of the vast benefits of cannabis, and utilized them. Jesus Christ of Nazareth used cannabis oil to rub on his own disciple's feet. I am a believer in Jesus. I have a personal relationship with my creator. I am also a Montana Medical Cannabis patient. I am also a caregiver. I believe in the medical use of cannabis. I have seen it benefit not only my life, but also the lives of many others.

After 8 ½ years of life lesson breaks from college, I am proud to say that I finally finished. I am the first one in my family to graduate from college. I finished all my requirements this last December, 2010. I actually go through the graduation ceremonies in May of 2011. I'm excited.

I am proof that cannabis does NOT ruin your life, and should NOT be seen as though it does. I have a two-year-old baby boy. He is my world. I have no words to describe how much I love my son. There are no words. I grew up around cannabis. I didn't grow up around alcohol. I didn't grow up around prescription drugs. I grew up around a lot of love and respect. I grew up appreciating the simple things in life. I will raise my son to do the same. I will raise my son to educate himself on things that he needs to form an opinion and judgment on. In raising him to value the little things in life, always look for the best in things and people, trust God always, love unconditionally, and do your best to be your best, I will raise my son with the same values that I was raised on. Cannabis never got in the way of that. It never will.

Many people suffer from 5 symptoms (among many others), cancer patients especially. These 5 are; nausea, decreased appetite, pain, depression, and lack of sleep. Many medications decrease nausea, but none, other than cannabis, increase appetite. I previously stated the two most popular pain medications – Oxycodone and Morphine. You saw what those drugs cause. Cannabis has been proven to not only decrease chronic pain, but also decreases spasticity AND seizures, while still decreasing nausea and increasing hunger. We move to depression. Many prescribed medications decrease depression. However, ONLY cannabis increases appetite, decreases nausea, decreases pain, seizures, and spasms, but ALSO increases mood. We must add lack of sleep. Ambien is a commonly prescribed sleep-aide. Ambien has these side effects; Suicidal thoughts, confusion, more outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal, strange behavior, depression, hallucinations (seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not really there), agitation or restlessness, fainting, slurred speech, coordination problems, and vision changes. Ambien can also cause sleepwalking, impotence (erectile dysfunction), hypertension (high blood pressure), and constipation. Cannabis not only aids in sleep, but also outperforms every other drug out there for the other 4 symptoms I just covered. Cannabis also helps people deal with Neuropathy. While many doctors prescribe anti-seizure medications for neuropathy, no drug helps deal with the symptoms of nerve damage, where pain medications and sedatives do little to help deal with neuropathy symptoms. Doctors are also realizing the extreme benefit cannabis is giving to ADD/ADHD sufferers. It just so happens that humans continuously produce endocannabinoid receptors in our bodies that perfectly match the cannabinoids found in cannabis, as though they were designed for each other. God made the cannabis plant. God designed humans to naturally be effected by cannabis in many various ways. We are literally hare-wired to benefit from cannabis. The side effects of cannabis are also considered the benefits of cannabis. Too much, and it usually results in a good night's rest.

In a YouTube video "The Science of Medical Cannabis: A conversation with Donald Abrams, M.D.", Dr. Abrams (chief of Hematology/Oncology at San Francisco General Hospital and professor of medicine at The University of California San Francisco) explains what I just went over. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHBsxfgbrbY>

I believe that the medical cannabis industry in Montana needs smart regulation. I am all for it. However, we CAN NOT stop medical cannabis in Montana. It has single-handedly crushed

the black market cannabis industry. If the state decides to repeal, then they will single-handedly bring the black market right back into play.

If this plant came out of the amazon a year ago, and no one had ever heard of this cannabis plant – doing all the good things that it does, then every drug company in the world would be racing to obtain it and distribute it to the people. This is not a medical issue. The medical proof is there. This is a political issue. Cannabis (marijuana) is not a gateway drug. It never was. The “gateway drug” of today is mom and dad’s, aunt and uncle’s, grandma and grandpa’s, or even our own medicine cabinet. The old “Reefer Madness” mentality is sheer ignorance creating stupidity. Montana people are not stupid. We should not be ignorant. I don’t want to see one more person suffer and die a harsh and tragic death because they never got the opportunity to properly utilize the great benefits of medical cannabis, but instead were persuaded by doctors to take pill after pill after pill that only made them worse! We must educate ourselves. We must learn the necessary information in order to make prudent and proper decisions regarding the regulation of this new and economically stimulating industry.

This industry is helping people who need help. It is rapidly stimulating the struggling Montana economy. It is rapidly eliminating the illegal distribution of cannabis in the black market. It is helping people live longer, happier, and healthier lives. I ask you who are reading this, educate yourself. Speak up for what you believe is right. Don’t get wrapped up in too many unnecessary politics. Do the right thing. Do not take cannabis away from a dying, prescription-pill-ridden people who deserve more from us. Search your heart, educate your brain, put it all together, and use Godly wisdom.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Seth A. McGhee

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It was the sound of a bone saw biting into a skull that convinced me to take the alternate medication known as MEDICAL CANNABIS seriously. (NO, NOT RECREATIONALLY!)

That was in late 2006. I was told by my VA doctor in Nebraska that if standard medication was unable to control my seizures there was always the option of having the hemispheres of my brain separated. So I went online and found the operation, pretty standard, they drill a hole in your skull, then use a bone saw to cut a hole big enough to get in there with the tools to finish the job. I watched several times and opted to move to Colorado and try Medical Cannabis instead, INSTEAD OF HAVING A SAW USED ON MY SKULL!

I had tried the standard seizure Treatment Medications from 1986-2006.  
I can DEFINITELY state that for me:

All seizure medications I had been on caused mood swings, irritability, insomnia, and they adversely affected my ability to focus.

NOW for 3 years I HAVE NONE of those Medication induced SIDE EFFECTS AND I CAN FOCUS!!

In Montana now they are talking of repealing the law permitting me to have Medical Cannabis, so I am going to represent this issue as far and as long as I have to to get IGNORANT people to stop thinking of it as an illicit menace. THEY ARE THE MENACE! They are menacing countless patients who need this for pain management, for seizures, for many many health related reasons. Montana is looking at the Colorado model, a BIG MISTAKE, because unfortunately Colorado has many problems in the way their system is run and from what I have personally witnessed Montana already does it better in many ways. Not perfectly and they want to repeal it, so we all have work ahead of us in our respective states. For instance, I must network with other Disabled Veterans suffering from TBI related seizures and migraines on this issue, both in this state and around the country.

My perspective in the committee hearing on the bills on Friday JAN 21 was as follows:

Limiting patients to 2 ounces a month is an arbitrary, punitive and not a therapeutic measure. I have seizures and migraines, some months I need more Medical Marijuana, some months less, so who on this legislating body can decide what is a therapeutic amount for me as a patient?

Secondly, making chronic pain patients seek more than one doctors assertion is a financially punitive measure, most people I know on the registry with chronic pain have a terrible time with doctors taking them seriously. Pain is subjective and most doctors have been trained to ignore it because it is not consistently able to be measured, PAIN is a personal thing. I know people who have been to doctors for years trying to get help with chronic pain and have been turned away, because there was nothing to be done or treated suspiciously, like they are trying to get drugs. I say requiring 2 doctors to sign off is needless abuse of patients who are already tired of the system ignoring their needs. PAIN IS REAL! Why punish those with chronic pain by making them jump through more hoops and spend more money than those without pain?

I had a tank accident in '86 and as a result of that TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) am a Disabled Vet since 1988. I worked as a counselor in Youth and Family Services in three states until my service connected disability got worse. I worked closely with Law Enforcement, and Social Services and I know how entrenched ideas can be. They have been trained even brainwashed to believe it should be a Schedule 1 drug based on nothing but the same hyperbole and hysteria that swept the Bureau of Narcotics into power...but I digress, as stated earlier, when my condition worsened the VA proposed the possibility of brain surgery for my seizures, I watched the exact operation online and began looking for alternatives. I discovered Medical Cannabis had been used for millenia in the treatment of seizures and it's efficacy well documented. I thought it had to be better than having somebody use a bonesaw on my skull. So I moved and began experimenting and discovered that Medical Cannabis has diminished the intensity and duration of my seizures, and migraines and improved my ability to focus.

We need good communication between Grower Caregivers, the Legislators, Law Enforcement and those in need who are on the Registry for all to coexist in peaceful understanding instead of suspicion.

The most common misperception appears to be that we are a bunch of pot smoking liberals, leftist hippie types trying to undermine the efforts to control a potentially dangerous drug. If you read the history of this plant, it was made illegal in the first place and demonized only due to political lobbying on the part of the Duponts (who stood to lose a lot of money if hemp was competing with their new product, Nylon) and the Hearst's (whose timber operations in Mexico had been nationalized, hemp pulp for newspapers was about to become a cheaper alternative than timber, and they wanted to continue to have a monopoly).

I am in fact a conservative, (I voted for Ronald Reagan twice and firmly believe in the rule of law or I couldn't have been a counselor for over 15 years with delinquents)

We are not anti-establishment types with an agenda. We are MOJO Registry participants, some as patients, some as caregivers, some as both. We believe in the therapeutic benefits available through the utilization of MOJO. We all want the same thing, that the MOJO can be grown and reach the patient in a safe and legal way.

I am a rule following conservative and I worked closely enough with Law Enforcement over the years to know

that any 'gray' area is a compromising place to be. If you are in doubt, you do not do it. I needed the medicinal benefits and whatever legal protection the Registry could afford. I went on the Registry because I refuse to compromise my integrity and reputation by engaging in any activity in a gray area. Yet can the caregiver/growers trust the authorities to respect their need to provide for their patients?

That is the crux. Trust. Law Enforcement is often underinformed about the growers. There is little defined and it needs to be, this issue is not going away, someone has to grow and provide the Medical Marijuana for the patients who cannot or will not grow for themselves. This isn't about recreational smoking, this is about alleviating suffering and Helping people.

I have examined this situation and believe that in order for Law Enforcement and the Growers to be comfortable there has to be transparency, accountability, self regulation, and security. I will address these issue one at a time.

#### Transparency:

The grows need not be covert ops, but for their own safety their location should not be broadcast. The growers books and grows need to be open to inspection. (With the caveat that no plants will be compromised in their development by an interruption of their 12 hour dark cycle during budding.) The patients HIPA information will be kept secure but the patients registry numbers will be available upon request.

Legitimate growers don't want to be covert, except for their own protection. They want to pay their taxes and have their businesses available to the protection and service of Law Enforcement. As it stands now though, there is uncertainty and an element of fear pervades among the growers and caregivers because those undefined gray areas make them a potential target for prosecution.

I am proposing that an oversight committee be created to improve communication between this fledgling industry and the powers that be. The best way to get the criminal element out is to put the grows into the hands of legitimate Registered growers who are growing MOJO for the patients benefit, and not to line their own pockets.

Prohibition of alcohol failed to do anything but make the bootleggers powerful criminals, with political influence trying to keep alcohol illegal because it would cut into their profits. The fact is IT IS THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT do not want regulation, or legislation, they want continued prohibition. When it becomes a medically available commodity you put the criminals further outside. There is little profit in that for them.

People with the desire to provide care should be able to have no fear of reprisal from the authorities. Not only are their lives cast into turmoil, but disruptions in growth cause this legitimate market to suffer an influx of an unsafe element.

#### SELF REGULATION:

In a market driven economy when the authorities are involved appropriately, there is always a certain amount of self regulation needed on the part of the industry. Ultimately, quality and a concern for providing good service will lead consumers to choose which establishments they want to frequent. In the field of MEDICAL CANNABIS, quality control is essential because MOJO suitable for treating the various pathologies and ailments can be grown to exacting specifications. In the proper environment patients would have access to kinds specifically geared to their needs. When I say self regulation I mean only that cultivation methodology should be left to the grower/caregivers, as various strains respond better to specific conditions. As time progresses as this is done legitimately, growers will become more proficient at their craft. With patient feedback it will become even more clear which kinds have greater effectiveness in providing which therapeutic benefits to whom. It is imperative to be able to keep the patient in the loop with the caregiver/growers, breeding plants with characteristics targeted to specific medical issues and needs.

#### SECURITY:

Given a choice between a clandestine rendezvous in an unsafe and non-legal environment, or purchasing their medicine from a caregivers dispensary which cooperates fully with the legal authorities, patients will of course choose the safest legal method to acquire their medicine. Under the auspices of the Registry, which does not address all issues, patients are given the right to acquire and utilize medical marijuana, but since some legal issues have not been addressed, they and their caregivers /growers, are still subject to all the full penalty of law in those gray areas.

We need better Education and Communication.  
Not Prohibition!

Andrew Boughter  
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN;

Hi my name is Kayla McOmber and I am Montana Medical Marijuana Card holder #3614. I served in the military and I am 100% disabled Veteran. for over 12 years now I have been on "prescribed medications for pain, depression, anxiety, insomnia from the V.A. (Fort Harrison)

Do you have any idea what it is like to have Doctors prescribe medication after medication to figure out what will help with your constant pain (lower back, left hip, and leg), that causes you to become depressed because you are in so much pain, and then you cannot sleep, because you are always in pain? A pill for this and a pill for that. Oh and then there is the side effects, and the pills you have to take for that, but the fact is Marijuana helps with the pain, the depression, and the sleep. With all the Medication that the V. A. had me on I slept 18 hours a day. I was so drugged up sometimes on the medication that they prescribed that it's a wonder I could even function.

My Doctor's at the V.A, are happy that I am off most of the medication I was on, they say if it works go with what helps, they know the side effects of the medications. Have you ever seen a T.V. commercial for any medication? I want to be like anybody else Happy to get up in the morning and get things done, WITH OUT pain! Some people need medication, because society say that if it is prescribed it's O.K. IT'S STILL A DRUG!

Some people need Alcohol to get through the day. IT'S STILL A DRUG! If you are one of the rare people that have no pain, are not depressed, and can sleep a night. GOD BLESSED you. I am not so lucky, I guess.

So as they say, live and let live. I voted for this program not because "I am a pot head", but because it is the only thing that seem to help with my condition. Yes, if you do away with medical Marijuana I will have to go back to the medications that the V.A. prescribes. More than likely there will be the same effects as before, like weight loss (I was down to 117lbs and I am 5' 9" tall. I now weigh 155, the correct weight for my height.) I can cope with the pain and the depression and I sleep 7 to 8 hours and I can also cope with my anxiety all with the use of only one "drug", MEDICAL MARIJIANA. Please do not take away my only hope of a normal life.

Thank you.

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