

Good morning members of the Senate. My name is Jelani Mahiri—M A H I R I—I am a registered voter in Gallatin County, and I am opposed to House Bill number 161.

I stand before you today not as a patient, though I have a deep respect for their needs, but as someone who earns their living working in the medical marijuana industry. I am hear to remind you that there are many others like myself—parents, grandparents, wives, husbands—who work hard everyday to make ends meet and who are grateful for the opportunity to work to support our families, to feed our children and to provide for our own basic needs. We assist caregivers in their role of providing a high quality medicinal product for patients in our towns. And this work is meaningful for us, it is meaningful for me, without it I would have great difficulty feeding my son and daughter and paying my bills. Without this work two of my female colleagues would not be able to support their families and themselves, feed their children and their partners who are unable to find work at this time. I stand before you because they cannot afford to take the time off to travel here to Helena and present their stories, reminding you that passing HB 161 not only affects patients and caregivers but all of the rest of us who have begun to rebuild our lives through our hard work within the medical marijuana industry and are currently able to have hope for a better tomorrow through these labors.

Furthermore, and to be frank, I am both saddened and appalled at Republican Mike Milburn's attempt to repeal the "Medical Marijuana Act," an act which was voted in by over 60% of Montana voters in 2004.

I am saddened because Mr. Milburn and others in the House who recently passed the repeal act are so eager and willing to disregard the health needs of a number of Montanans for what appears to be nothing more than political gain. They have offered few legitimate medical rationales for their repeal, and no alternatives.

I am appalled because Mr. Milburn and others not only disregard Montanans' health needs, they also show an utter contempt for our political voices and actions by working to completely overturn what has been voted in by the people of the state. Our federal government currently sends troops overseas to fight for "democracy." The state of Montana sends some of its citizens overseas to partake in these struggles. Yet, Mr. Milburn and others of the House tell us that our votes do not count, that though we have the right to vote, they have the right to take away our vote and our voices.

The truly frightening issue is that Mr. Milburn and others who support House Bill 161 not only want to repeal the Medical Marijuana Act, they want to silence the voters of Montana. They wish to dictate to us what is the(ir) right way to live, to work, and to seek health, despite the claims we have already made to the contrary. Is this the message that we want to send to our children, to others around the world when we tell them we live in a Democracy—that our votes count only as much as those who govern say so? Tragically, this is the message that Mr. Milburn and others have so clearly dictated for us in their actions for a repeal. If Mr. Wilburn and his colleagues are comfortable making a mockery of democracy and playing a political game with people's health needs, I only hope that members of the Senate are able to show a greater wisdom, a greater courage and a greater commitment to the voters of the State of Montana by opposing House Bill 161.

Sincerely,



Jelani Mahiri, Ph.D

3/11/11