

Medical Marijuana Commission

Minutes of Meeting
2021-2022 Interim
August 27, 2021

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Joseph A. Marino, III called the meeting to order at 10:36 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Joseph A Marino, III
Representative C. Travis Johnson
Representative Jack G. McFarland
Representative Markham Scott McKnight
Representative Thomas A. Pressly, IV
Representative Troy D. Romero
Representative Debbie Villio

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Nicholas Cole, attorney
Trinicia Bryant, committee administrative assistant

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Faye Talbot, sergeant at arms

III. DISCUSSION

Organizational meeting to select a chairman and establish commission goals and scheduling of future meetings

Representative Marino stated that the first order of business would be to elect a chairman for the Medical Marijuana Commission. Representative McFarland offered a motion to elect Representative

Marino as chairman. Without objection, Representative Marino was elected chairman of the Medical Marijuana Commission by a vote of 6 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Marino, C. Travis Johnson, McFarland, McKnight, Romero, and Villio voted yea.

Chairman Marino suggested electing a vice chairman in the event one would be needed. Representative McKnight offered a motion to elect Representative Villio as vice chairman. Without objection, Representative Villio was elected vice chairman of the Medical Marijuana Commission by a vote of 6 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Marino, C. Travis Johnson, McFarland, McKnight, Romero, and Villio voted yea.

Chairman Marino explained that the purpose of the meeting is to set a schedule for the commission and to discuss the topics that will be covered going forward. He read a list of goals of the commission set forth by House Resolution 113 of the 2021 Regular Session. He then welcomed congressional gold medal recipient Steve Gleason to the commission, who attended the meeting to speak on his experience with medical marijuana throughout his battle with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

Testimony from Steve Gleason

Steve Gleason, former NFL player for the New Orleans Saints, addressed the committee with a prepared speech to discuss how medical marijuana changed his life. Mr. Gleason testified that he was diagnosed with ALS over a decade ago and was told he would pass away within the next three years. As the disease progressed, he was prescribed medication to help with his symptoms of pain, depression and anxiety. Although he disliked taking prescription medication, he felt he had no choice because he was not offered any other solutions. His medication began causing severe side effects, and he no longer wished to take them. His friend, who lived in a state where medical marijuana was legal, suggested he try a tincture to help alleviate his symptoms. Medical marijuana was illegal in Mr. Gleason's state, but he decided to try the tincture. Mr. Gleason described the tincture as being less intense than his prescription medication, and it also helped him feel productive with more energy. After a while of using the tincture, he was able to stop taking his prescription medication. He explained that many of his friends with ALS also live in states where medical marijuana is not available, and like him, they would have to take the risk of committing the crime of using it illegally to get the benefits he experienced. Mr. Gleason thanked the commission for helping to make medical marijuana accessible to patients in Louisiana.

Chairman Marino introduced Mr. Nicholas Cole, attorney for the House Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development committee. He stated that Mr. Cole will be working with the Medical Marijuana Commission and requested him to give a legislative history of medical marijuana in Louisiana. Mr. Cole discussed a time line regarding the promulgation of legislation on medical marijuana in Louisiana from 1972 to present day. He provided a handout entitled "Medical Marijuana Commission", Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records.

Chairman Marino commended Senator Mills for authoring Act 261 in 2015 that built the framework for patients in Louisiana to have access to medical marijuana. Chairman Marino further stated that marijuana was first made legal in Louisiana in 1978, and it was not until 2019 that patients had legal access to it.

Chairman Marino expressed that he wants to schedule the commission's upcoming meetings based on the three entities associated with the bill to efficiently address each of their different regulations. The three entities are the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners, and the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy. He stated that at the next meeting, he wants to discuss the regulations on the cultivation process with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. He set the next meeting for October 1, 2021, at 9:30 a.m.

Representative McFarland suggested that moving forward, the commission address individuals with medical marijuana recommendations in employment having no exemptions when they fail a drug test, and that medical marijuana is not covered by pharmaceutical plans. He would like for the commission to come up with options on how to solve these challenges. Representative C. Travis Johnson agreed with Representative McFarland and suggested that they analyze lowering the cost of medical marijuana.

IV. PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Mr. C. Gary Wainwright, Louisiana Cannabis Coalition, 2739 Tulane Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70119, (504) 913-9252, spoke for information only stating he is an activist for marijuana legalization and gave a brief history on the Marijuana Tax Act that was passed in 1937. He believes the phrase "doctor's recommendation" is what allowed the medicinal use of cannabis today and is hopeful that the commission will be successful at making medical marijuana available to patients.

Mr. Donnell Henderson, Pastor, Full Faith Christian Fellowship Church, 41040 North First Street, Ponchatoula, LA 70454, (985) 634-7618, spoke for information only as a spokesperson for cannabis-based products for medical purposes. He is a pastor who uses a cannabis-based topical product for sciatic nerve pain after becoming allergic to ibuprofen. He has suggested to his church and family members that they also use the topical product for pain relief.

Mr. Randy Hayden, ANR Foundation, 13144 Perkins Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70810, (225) 763-8988, spoke for information only. He provided two map graphs, "State and Local Laws Prohibiting Smoking AND Vaping Marijuana", Exhibit B, and "States with Legalized Marijuana", Exhibit C, which are included in the committee records.

Mr. Paige Melancon, Louisiana Hemp Extractors, 2742 Oscar Rivette Road, Arnaudville, LA 70512, (337) 418-9498, spoke for information only. He expressed his interest in becoming an authorized marijuana processor at his facility where they follow LDH and FDA guidelines.

Ms. Katelyn Castleberry, Cannabis Council of Louisiana, 1512 Homestead Avenue, Metairie, LA 70005, (504) 331-0343, spoke for information only. She testified that she has an autistic son who uses a medical marijuana tincture that costs up to one thousand dollars per month. She thanked the commission for making a difference in patient care and hopes the insurance companies can work toward making medical marijuana products more affordable.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 3 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

Statements submitted in accordance with House Rule 14.33 in lieu of appearing before the committee are as follows: 3 for information only. Copies of these statements are included in the committee records.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Representative Pressly offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 7 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Marino, C. Travis Johnson, McFarland, McKnight, Pressly, Romero, and Villio voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Joseph Marino
House Medical Marijuana Commission

Date adopted:

The committee has acknowledged on _____, that these minutes were prepared in accordance with the rules of the House of Representatives.