



March 12, 2026

Good Afternoon, Chair Donovan and Honorable members of the Committee,

My name is Ellen Smith, and I am a 75-year-old Rhode Island resident, a member of the Board of Directors, and Co-Director of Medical Cannabis Advocacy for the U.S. Pain Foundation, and also a Rhode Island resident living with a painful, progressive, and incurable condition.

I am here to voice my **strong support of House Bill 7537** - allowing compassionate use of cannabis, not smoked or vaporized, and stored in a locked box, for terminally ill patients in their healthcare facility.

According to the CDC, there are approximately 220,000 residents of Rhode Island living with chronic pain, defined as pain lasting more than 3 months, and in most cases, years or a lifetime. Of those, approximately 77,000 are living with high-impact chronic pain, meaning pain that interferes with the ability to function daily. Many of these patients, who have found pain relief with the use of cannabis, will be facing the stage I am close to, being older. How will we use their cannabis if they need to be moved to a facility at the end stage of their life?

I had to have DNA drug sensitivity testing done since, with my over twenty-nine surgeries, it was discovered I was not metabolizing typical medications to relieve pain. The results confirmed I was unable to use any medications over the counter, along with all opiates. The extensive list was frightening and concerning, which is why my pain doctor in 2007, suggested I try cannabis since that and ketamine were the only pain medications that my body could benefit from. Deciding to listen to this doctor saved my life, taught me to speak out and advocate about the safety and relief cannabis can provide, and I quickly learned I was fortunate I was in a state that in 2006, allowed the right to use it. But, as I now face progression of my condition that is now affecting my heart, I understand my time is shortening on this earth.

So what will we do with me if I need to be admitted to Hospice or another facility? At this time, although it is legal for me to grow and use cannabis, I am still not able to use it in the hospital and other facilities. Can you imagine what I have had to endure in a hospital after surgery, not being allowed to use what only works in my body? I don't need to add stress to my body with the thought of wondering how my ending would be without this bill passing. I've had a good life despite my struggles, but the thought of suffering more than I have had to at the end is beyond my imagination.



I testified for this bill last year, and it never got out of committee. I am hoping, as my time is shortening and I have no other option to turn to for pain relief, that this will be the year this moves forward and becomes approved in RI.

**Presently, the following states have activated this bill for their terminal patients:**

- **California:** Passed Senate Bill 311 (Ryan's Law) in 2021
- **Maine:** Allows for medical cannabis use in healthcare facilities. Inpatient hospice programs and nursing facilities can register as caregivers to facilitate access to medical marijuana, ensuring it can be used within the facility.
- **Washington State:** As of March 2026, legislation has been passed and sent to the Governor that would require healthcare facilities, including hospitals, nursing homes, and hospices, to permit terminally ill patients to use medical cannabis on-site.
- **Texas:** The Compassionate Use Program (TCUP) allows for the use of low-THC cannabis for patients with terminal illnesses, which can be managed under hospice or palliative care.

**States like Rhode Island with similar bills submitted:**

- New Mexico
- Mississippi
- South Dakota
- Virginia
- Pennsylvania

Please continue to have compassion for those of us who are finding success with the use of cannabis for pain relief and provide a kind, gentle, and safe ending for us when our time comes to move to our final terminal stage. Please move **House Bill 7537** forward and help your constituents.

Thank you for your kindness and support

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen Lenox Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ellen Lenox Smith  
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