

## **KIM PATRICK O'LEARY**

s.22(1) Personal and Confidential

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My name is Kim Patrick O'Leary. I am 60 years old. I will tell you a bit about myself and why I use cannabis as medicine and why I wish to address council regarding licensing regulations for cannabis dispensaries.

I have worked as an Editor/Researcher at the Canadian Encyclopedia. I read law as an editor for legal publishers for 12 years and was Managing Editor of the Vancouver branch office of Butterworths Law Publishers. I have also worked in gift shops, bookstores, picture framing shops, at the Arbutus Club, as a typesetter, and I now work as a photographer. The olympics were devastating for my business, so I work 2 days a week at a gift shop on granville island. It was 3 days a week until last week, which is why I can be here today. I also work one day a week doing housecleaning which is very difficult to do now. I have a B.A. from Trent University.

I do not drink alcohol, it makes me very sick. And I am very allergic to tobacco. Our parents smoked heavily and I was often sick as a child. I have various pains and ailments. Some are visible, some are not, though scars are visible under my clothes.

I began using cannabis at age 17 when I went to Trent University. A very quiet student approached me one day and asked if I ever slept... of course he could tell I didn't. My nerves were so bad by this point that I weighed about 115 pounds, could barely face eating food etc. I did not understand until years later that I probably had cortisol in my bloodstream all the time for the first 20 years of my life, because of the incredible stress at home. I rarely slept unless my father was away. This student gave me a few joints to smoke and said try a bit, and see if it helps you sleep. Oh, my, gosh... I had never slept so well in my life. Not even with the drugs given to me after surgery. I began to use cannabis medicinally to help me sleep. Very soon, i realized it increased my appetite, and I started to gain weight. And feel better. I started exercising more. I continued purchasing cannabis off the street for another 25 years. It helped with nausea in the morning, and arthritis pain, and helped with sleep at night.

One of the main reasons for smoking is because I had my gall bladder removed when I was 17 and I had constant health and internal problems. There was massive haemmoraging the night of the surgery, so the recovery was very long. Even then my doctors would tell me that cannabis would help with my irritable bowel syndrome and stomach aches. It did.

I was diagnosed with arthritis in both hips in 1998 by my former doctor. He would not prescribe cannabis. I told him I could not take arthritis medication as it made me sick. So he did a series of tests, called me in and declared "you are a mess inside". This is from the surgery after the massive haemmoraging. He agreed that taking pharmaceuticals would cause me problems and finally signed a prescription for cannabis.

I am one of the first 100 members of the first dispensary in Canada, the British Columbia Compassion Club Society. I joined 18 years ago. I joined because I felt it legitimized my use to some degree. Also, I felt more secure purchasing my medicine from the BCCCS because the medicine was tested. It was also a very safe, welcoming and compassionate space! I had never felt so safe. To become a member, I did not have the doctor's prescription at that time, so I had to

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relinquish ten year's worth of my medical files to Hilary Black, who had set up the club. I was very nervous about this. I was allowed to join, after the staff (and possibly their lawyer John Conroy, with whom I have worked) read through my medical file. Eventually I was able to provide the prescription from my doctor.

I was in a bus mishap in December 1999. A bus braked at 25kph and everyone hit the floor. I hit the floor with my right shoulder. Every time I roll over in bed I wake up. Indica strains of cannabis help me sleep more soundly and less restlessly and I am able to go back to sleep more easily. If I don't smoke, I only sleep for an hour or two.

I tore a ligament in my right knee in 2005. Smoking cannabis, and biking every day helps relieve the pain. As well as a cannabis based cream which is miraculous.

The money from sales of cannabis at BCCCS goes towards purchase of more cannabis, as well testing for mould, fungi, heavy metals etc, plus education, staff salaries, insurance, and most importantly, for the Wellness Center which is attached. The Wellness Center used to be funded substantially by sales of cannabis. However, sales are down, with the proliferation of "pot shops" and the Wellness Center is struggling, and having to charge for their services. I do not have the money to pay for this, but need their services. I had 4 root canals last summer, and am even more deeply in debt because of this.

I have used the Wellness Center a great deal over the years. I worked with the counsellor there for a year and a half while I was going through a very difficult separation from my partner. She was the best counsellor I have ever met, and I have seen many people and spent well over \$5,000 on counselling and therapy. I have attended the Wellness Center for massage therapy to help with the arthritis pain. Presently I am seeing a herbalist there who is amazing. She has helped tremendously in the past 10 months, and I am feeling better because of her help.

If the BCCCS had to move because of the school I believe it would be very difficult to find a landlord who will be so compassionate about the rent. The BCCCS does not make a profit. The annual reports are available to show this. All the money goes back into operating all the services for the members. So, a high licence fee will be difficult because it will come out of the member's pockets. I don't have enough money for food or rent this month, let alone medicine, hydro, phone etc. If a bar, restaurant, tavern, smoke shop does not have to pay this high licensing fee, why should a non-profit Cannabis Dispensary Society have to pay this high licensing fee?

I believe there is too much hysteria surrounding the issue of schools and community centers. We are discussing cannabis... not heroin. It has now been proven, and the medical community is beginning to accept, that cannabis is less dangerous than alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, heroin, etc. It is a very mild analgesic, with very few side effects. No one dies from cannabis use.

I think the issue of distance from schools needs to be revisited. Children need to learn that cannabis is a medicine. Alcohol and tobacco are not, yet children can see these being purchased and consumed all over. Please introduce a grandfather clause, or change the clause, to allow non-profit cannabis dispensaries located near schools, if they have been in existence for more than 4 years and if there have been no problems, to continue operating in their present

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location. I have helped a few businesses move and I know a few business owners who have moved their business and in almost every instance it has been difficult or disastrous.

I am shocked and dismayed at the ignorant and uneducated position and statements of the Prime Minister, the conservative government and especially Canada's Health Minister. Thank goodness for the recent Supreme Court decision regarding the right of patients to choose their preferred form of medicine. And, thank you to Vancouver City Council for allowing the public to speak to the issues regarding the licensing of cannabis dispensaries. I read the entire LeDain Commission Report on Marijuana and I am pleased that we are now once again having a mature, professional, rational, educated, and intelligent discussion regarding the use of medical marijuana. Perhaps not in Ottawa.

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The BCCCS has always been so discreet that no one knew it was there, because there was no sign. With over 90 dispensaries now, it has become a non-issue and there is now a small sign in the window with the name and logo.

Please come and visit the Compassion Club and you will see that the Club and Wellness Center are a Medical Clinic.

Thank you for your time, and for listening to our requests.