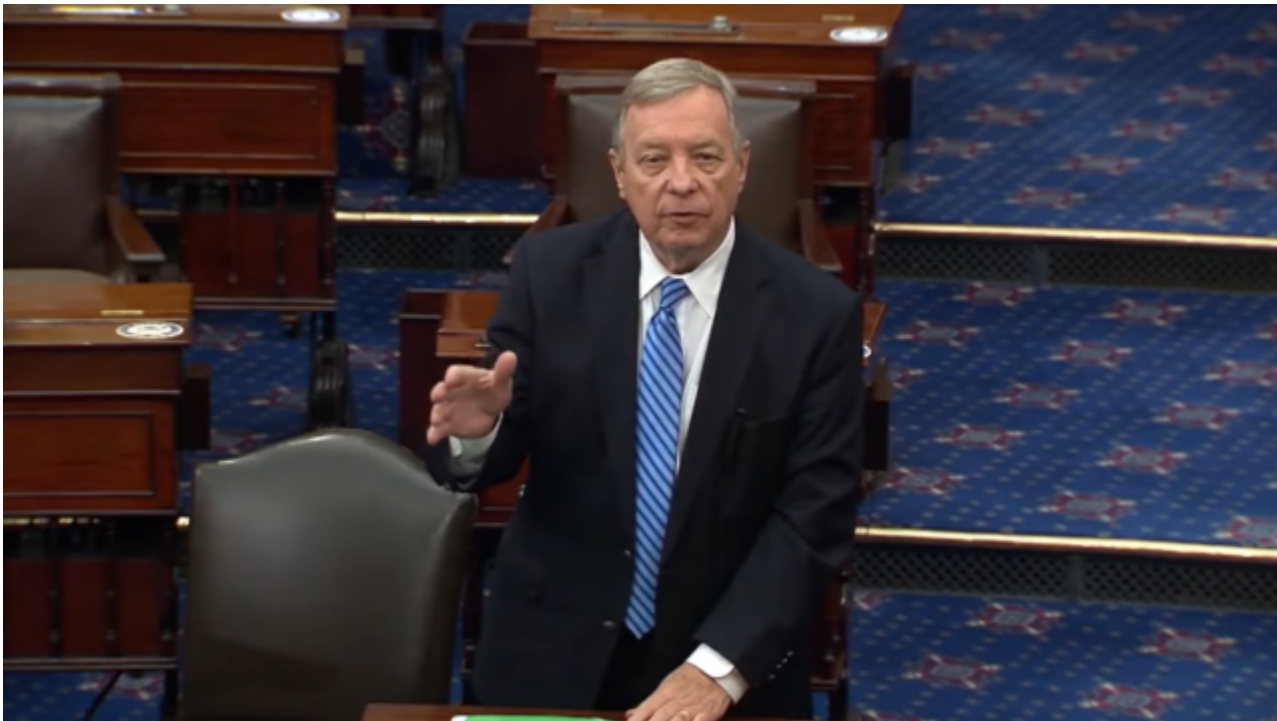


Durbin Questions Witnesses At Senate Judiciary Subcommittee Hearing On Federal Cannabis Policy

July 27 2022 10:33 AM



WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today questioned witnesses at the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism hearing entitled “Decriminalizing Cannabis at the Federal Level: Necessary Steps to Address Past Harms.” Durbin first commended Weldon Angelos, President and Co-Founder of The Weldon Project, for sharing his experience as someone who has been personally impacted by the “war on drugs,” and for his continued advocacy for criminal justice reform.

Mr. Angelos was serving 55 years in federal prison for three counts of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime and various charges related to marijuana trafficking. He was released on May 31, 2016, after a federal court granted him a reduction in sentence. Mr. Angelos' sentence was so extreme that his judge, unable to go below the mandatory minimum, called on then-President Obama to commute Mr. Angelos' sentence.

Durbin then asked Mr. Angelos about the racial disparities inherent in marijuana law enforcement that he saw firsthand while incarcerated.

"You heard the testimony from Mr. Cook that the application of the laws on marijuana are not racially... biased," Durbin said. "Did you see a different world?"

Mr. Angelos responded, "Absolutely. Nearly everyone I met in prison incarcerated for cannabis were Black and Latino."

As of 2018, Black Americans were 3.64 times more likely than white Americans to be arrested for marijuana possession, even though Black and white people use and possess marijuana at similar rates. That racial disparity exists in all types of communities irrespective of differences in income level. Native Americans and Hispanic Americans have also been disproportionately impacted by enforcement of marijuana laws.

Durbin then asked Dr. Malik Burnett, Medical Director at the Maryland Department of Health's Center for Harm Reduction Services, about the importance of marijuana research. Since marijuana remains a Schedule I drug under the *Controlled Substances Act*, under federal law it can only be used by researchers in very limited capacities that have been approved by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This federal research approval process, which is also often coupled with state and local requirements, involves multiple applications, lengthy waiting periods, costly compliance with security measures for handling and storing the substance, inspections of research facilities, submission of various protocols, and more.

"Now we have federal agencies that are talking for the first time about doing actual research to see if there is a positive thing that marijuana can be used for. What are your thoughts on that?" Durbin asked Dr. Burnett.

Dr. Burnett responded that there is significant potential within the cannabis plant for medical use. "If we are able to free universities, particularly, from the fear of losing their

federal funding then they would be able to conduct these research studies,” Dr. Burnett stated. “If we remove cannabis from the Schedule, it will allow the various NIH institutes to be able to participate.”

“And my obvious question is why wouldn’t we investigate it, research it, find out one way or the other whether it works or it doesn’t work,” Durbin stated.

Durbin is a cosponsor of the bipartisan and Senate-passed [*Cannabidiol and Marijuana Research Expansion Act*](#). The bill would encourage scientific and medical research on marijuana and its compounds including cannabidiol, or CBD, by removing some of the significant barriers to research in current federal law.

Finally, Durbin asked Dr. Burnett about his earlier comments about ensuring that cannabis products are not marketed to children.

“What about my concern I expressed early on about keeping this out of the hands of kids? ... Shouldn’t we make a conscious effort to make sure that the product is not sold to children?” Durbin asked.

Dr. Burnett agreed.

Video of Durbin’s questions in Committee is available [here](#).

Audio of Durbin’s questions in Committee is available [here](#).