



HEROIC HEARTS PROJECT

Heroic Hearts Project, Inc
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Dear Washington DC Board of Elections:

I am writing to you today as both a military veteran and as a US citizen and I respectfully request your support of the initiative to Decriminalize entheogenic plants and fungi. As a veteran, I represent the voice of a community that is suffering through an unprecedented mental health crisis. As a civilian, I bring the simple request to reexamine certain laws that are now outdated and preventing the emergence of effective treatment options.

The prospect of decriminalization may seem daunting on the surface. Before entheogenic plants saved my life, I would have been skeptical as well, but I've come to discover that my prejudices were not supported by facts. A prominent concern around this subject comes from a view that decriminalization will increase use and abuse leading to social and health concerns. To this point, we must explore whether the overall public benefit of decriminalization outweighs the cost.

Heroic Hearts Project is a non-profit foundation dedicated to healing veteran mental trauma through psychedelic based therapy. These veterans reach out to us after having explored the full spectrum of therapies offered through the Department of Veteran Affairs: talk therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, EMDR, and every combination of medications that you can imagine. All had limited success. *'I did not die in war, but I was dying back home'* is one particularly poignant message I received from a veteran who was losing hope inside the VA.

Each of the veterans in our program served this country under the principals of duty and honor. Each one of these veterans also came to my foundation out of desperation. These men and women were all seeking to regain their lives. Psychedelic therapy saved these lives. I could fill this entire letter with stories of veterans who have been saved through psychedelic therapy like Rudy the Green Beret, who for the first time felt real joy spending a Sunday morning making pancakes with his ten year old son; or Army Ranger Anthony, who emerged from his darkest point to finally realize that his life has value. Every day, veterans are turning towards these vilified substances and finding a hope that they haven't felt in years.

Among the veteran population, rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and suicide have soared. Since the start of the Global War on Terrorism, more veterans have died as a result of suicide than in combat by more than a factor of 20. Veterans are also four times more likely to have suffered from opioid addiction as a direct result of negligent pain management programs. Despite over \$80 billion dollars of funding, the Department of Veteran Affairs has not been able to find any real solutions to this epidemic.

Every day more and more veterans are choosing to abandon their free VA healthcare due to a loss of faith in the system. These veterans are forced to find their own solutions, which are largely coming in the form of cannabis and psychedelic plants. According to a survey conducted by the American Legion, Eighty-three percent of veteran households surveyed indicated that they believe the federal government should legalize medical cannabis nationwide. As a result, the American Legion, which is one of this country's most respected military organizations, has publicly come out in support of drug policy change.

Two other substances, MDMA and psilocybin, which were once viewed as dangers to society have both received the official "Breakthrough Therapy" designation by the Food and Drug Administration for treating PTSD and depression. Veterans are already using these alternative therapies en masse, but due to lagging drug policies they are largely not able to pursue these options under the guidance of trained professionals.

The fear around decriminalizing psychedelic plants is to be expected. These same fears were common when cannabis initially started to become legalized. Despite the worst fears of these laws leading to societal breakdown, life in cannabis friendly states has continued normally. We now also have two models for the decriminalization of entheogenic plants in Denver and Oakland, and again daily life has hardly been affected. What has happened instead is an emergence of new therapy options and ground-breaking research projects.

We understand that some lawmakers may be hesitant and believe decriminalization not to be the appropriate next step. These same lawmakers may prefer to wait for more research before proceeding further. We at Heroic Hearts Project would love nothing more than to have open research into each and every one of these substances. Unfortunately, the system of laws around drug policy has made this nearly impossible.

For the past 50 years, organizations have tried to find approval through the normal routes. Most efforts have failed. The few research projects that have struggled through still meet daily limitations and as a result, these life-saving studies have progressed at a snail's pace. Current laws prohibit the use of federal money to study these controlled substances. These same laws have been used to pressure universities and other organizations into avoiding any association with the study of these plants. Further, although these plants have a huge societal benefit, major pharmaceuticals have had no economic incentive to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in clinical studies because they cannot patent the treatments. Without federal funding, support

from universities, and limited marketable value, it has been nearly impossible to conduct research. Decriminalization will be a major step in breaking down these barriers.

The movement to decriminalize these plant based substances is the only logical step forward. Danger thrives in the shadows of prohibition. Decriminalization can only bring safety and knowledge around the therapeutic use of substances that are already widely available. It will allow therapist to speak candidly to clients, researchers and students to pursue areas of study without fear of retribution, and an overall more educated society. By bringing this topic into the light we can honestly discuss all potentials for safe use and also protect against abuse.

We are not criminals, we are not drug addicts. We are veterans who have fought for this country. We now need this country to fight for us.

Jesse Gould
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Heroic Hearts Project, Inc

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jesse Gould". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.