

Prepared Statement

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- *Two-time member of the D.C. Bar's Lawyer's Assistance Committee.*
- *Current member of the D.C. Superior Court's Criminal Justice Act Panel.*
- *One of the world's leading legal experts on entheogens.*

To the ladies and gentlemen of the D.C. Board of Elections, and to the members of the public, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share a few points. We are here to have an honest dialogue about entheogens and about this ballot initiative. We hope that you approve the initiative and allow the democratic process to unfold in the District on this historic measure.

Responsible adults should have the right to develop healing relationships with plant medicines free from the threat of criminal prosecution. The Drug War has been a war on people, the brunt of which has been felt by people of color. It has also been a war on information. Over the last fifty years it has been incredibly difficult for people to come forward and say, yes, I've been helped plant medicines. The laws have been too tight. The stigmas have been too great. The threat of prosecution has been too tremendous. And so has been the suffering of people.

I am a current member of the D.C. Criminal Justice Act Panel. Each day I see the effects of unresolved mental health and substance abuse issues on the District's most vulnerable residents, who I represent in criminal matters over at the D.C. Superior Court. I love my clients. I want the best for them. I see them involved in a system that struggles to facilitate their healing. In speaking out in support of this initiative, I am fighting for their rights to develop healing relationships with nature's medicines.

I've seen people heal by developing relationships with entheogens. I need look no further than my own life. Entheogens played a critical role in getting me on the path of recovery from alcoholism and substance abuse in the 1990s. They also helped me overcome serious mental health issues that remained even after many years in 12-step recovery, extensive therapy and intermittent use of pharmaceuticals.

I learned about one of the entheogens covered by the initiative, ayahuasca, from vets who had gone public about their healing experiences. At the time, I thought to myself, "good to know in case the trauma or PTSD returns." When the trauma did return, I was desperate enough to try something—ayahuasca—that had been described as the "vine of death." I participated in several lawful ceremonies protected under state and federal Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRAs). I followed strict guidance provided to me on how to prepare. Over the course of several ceremonies, I healed early childhood wounds, released oceans of grief, including from my father's death, and was able to revisit a graphic event from my teenage years (that I will not further describe here) and heal from those wounds. Because of plant medicines I am now trauma and PTSD free.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today and for your service to the District.