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Medical marijuana would save Kentucky lives

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A worrisome component of veteran post-traumatic stress disorder with chronic pain is the constant, ever-hovering specter of addiction and suicide among the veteran population. The suicide rate is reported to be as much as 22 a day. That may seem too high an estimate, but a suicide a day is 30 a month, and one a day too much.

Meanwhile, a recent Journal of the American Medical Association report showed a 25 percent drop in opioid overdose deaths in states with medical marijuana laws, and a Cato Institute report from January 2015 cited a 5 percent drop in suicides in states with legal medical marijuana. We would expect to see a similar drop in veteran addiction overdose deaths and suicides should the Kentucky General Assembly pass a medical cannabis law this session.

Veterans have long recognized the beneficial effects of medical marijuana. Veterans in medical cannabis states report great success when using medical marijuana for PTSD, chronic pain and a number of other conditions for which medical marijuana is effective.

During 2013 there were 1,019 opioid overdose deaths in Kentucky and in 2010 there were 609 successful suicide attempts. A comprehensive medical marijuana program could have prevented 30 suicide deaths and 255 overdose deaths.

We strongly urge the Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs and the General Assembly to actively support passage of a strong comprehensive medical cannabis bill as soon as possible. The lives of our veterans and citizens depend on it!