

## Letter: Medical pot offers hope for autistic children

12:09 a.m. EDT August 25, 2015



(Photo: Steve Perez / The Detroit News)

In the United States, and in Michigan, autism is growing. In fact, it is growing at such an alarming rate that it has just recently been identified as a significant public health issue, due to statistics provided by the Center for Disease Control's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, a nationwide federal program that

tracks autism rates around the country.

Estimates show that autism rates have risen in every report since tracking began in 2002, from 1 in 150 in 2002 to 1 in 68 in 2010. There is not a cure, however, new studies show, autism can be treated.

Some 800 pages of research along with 75 peer review articles on cannabis as a viable option for the treatment of autism were recently gathered by Dr. Christian Bogner, a prominent pediatrician currently in practice with one of Metro Detroit's largest health systems, and presented to LARA, the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs.

This data is part of a new, thoroughly researched petition to add autism to the list of conditions, which can be treated with medical marijuana. On July 31 in Lansing, the Michigan Medical Marijuana Review Panel voted yes to recommending medical cannabis as a legal, permissible treatment for all autistic patients. This would include pediatric and juvenile patients under the age of 18 with approval from two physicians. That recommendation is currently being considered by David Zimmer, director of LARA, a Gov. Rick Snyder appointee. The fate of thousands of autistic children now rests in his hands.

It has been a long and difficult road. Initially, and despite what can only be described as overwhelming evidence, LARA, tasked with addressing petitions for new conditions, initially refused to hold a hearing or even consider the petition. As a result, attorneys Tim Knowlton and myself, the Michigan Medical Marijuana Association, and Cannabis Patients United, sued LARA in Ingham County Court. It was only after nearly a year of litigation and foot dragging that LARA ceded its position. Attorney General Bill Schuette's office "defended" LARA's position by delaying for months, only yielding after the petitioner filed her brief with the court, days before oral arguments. Meanwhile, parents are treating their autistic children, typically orally in tandem with olive oil or other edible sources.

Today, we are at a crossroads. A pivotal moment in history.

All too often the issues regarding medical marijuana are politicized. What is at issue here is the right and desire of parents to protect and treat their children, without fear of breaking the law. What would each of us do for our children if similarly afflicted? In particular when there is medicine available that has already proven effective in treating epilepsy and autism? Our families should have choices. Michigan's parents and their children should have hope.

**Michael Komorn**, president,

Michigan Medical Marijuana Association

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2015/08/25/medical-pot-autistic-children/32279201/>