



CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

by

**THE HONOURABLE DR. MICHAEL R. DARVILLE, M.P.
MINISTER OF HEALTH & WELLNESS**

on

CANNABIS LEGISLATION, 2024

House of Assembly
Wednesday, 15th May, 2024
10:00a.m.

Madam Speaker,

Today, I rise to lay at the appropriate time the long awaited Medical Cannabis Legislation. I want to once again thank the people of Tall Pines for sending me to this honorable place to fight to assist many who are suffering from complex, debilitating diseases. This morning, I am moved by the hundreds of Bahamian stories that underscore the urgency and necessity of our actions. This legislation is inspired by the people it aims to serve; our families, neighbors and friends whose experiences and challenges call us to act with compassion and determination.

Madam Speaker,

Over the last two and a half years as your Minister I have had the profound privilege of meeting many patients across the country whose lives are shadowed by cancer, chronic pain, anxiety, clinical depression and other forms of debilitating medical conditions. I recall a recent conversation with a mother whose son suffers from a severe form of epilepsy and despite numerous treatments, his days are marked by profound struggle. In brief discussions with his mother, she spoke not just of her son's pain but of her family's daily

heartache and their constant search for alternative forms of therapy that could improve his quality of life.

Madam Speaker,

This legislation is for that family. It is for the mother who prays for a day without pain for her child and her ability to legally access Cannabidiol (CBD) oils prescribed by a neurologist abroad, that proved to be effective with his treatment combined with other anti-seizure medication.

Madam Speaker,

This compendium of legislation is also for the elderly man whose quality of life dramatically improved with access to medical cannabis for his chronic degenerative joint pains. It is for the young woman battling cancer, seeking to alleviate the overwhelming nausea and vomiting that accompanies her chemotherapy treatments. All these patients having crossed borders to access medical cannabis and bring it back into the country illegally in order to have access to these proven medical therapies.

Madam Speaker,

Healthcare is deeply personal to many of us. Each story reminds me why I am here and why we are all here. We are here to serve, to ease suffering, and to offer hope where there has been none. The introduction of these Medical Cannabis Bills comes from a place of listening, a response to the cries for help that have gone unanswered for far too long.

We have consulted widely, engaging with experts and community leaders to ensure our approach is balanced and informed. The Rastafarian community, medical professionals, law enforcement, and religious groups have all provided invaluable insights that have helped to shape the Bills before us today. I believe what we are doing today deepens our commitment to our democratic process and strengthens our commitment to inclusive, responsive governance.

Madam Speaker,

The journey to this moment has indeed been humbling. It has been a journey of learning, understanding, and recognizing the potential for healing and relief that medical cannabis can bring. It has reinforced my belief that our role in health

care is not just to treat symptoms but to touch lives, to understand the human experience behind each case, and to act with empathy and courage.

Today, I am pleased to outline the specifics of the compendium of bills that establishes a regulated medical cannabis framework for The Bahamas, demonstrating our administration's commitment to progressive healthcare solutions while ensuring robust regulatory oversight to protect public health.

The centerpiece of this legislative package, the Cannabis Bill 2024, is designed to introduce a controlled system for cannabis use in medical treatments. This Bill establishes the Bahamas Cannabis Authority, a regulatory body overseeing all aspects of cannabis management from cultivation to distribution. The Authority's mandate is to ensure that cannabis production and use are safe, controlled, and effectively integrated into our healthcare system.

Accompanying this is the Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Bill, which reclassifies cannabis by removing it from the list of "dangerous drugs" and recognizing its potential for medical use. This change aligns our national laws with evolving global perspectives on cannabis, acknowledging its medical value based on current scientific evidence. This Bill also sets stringent penalties for violations of the new regulations, maintaining strict controls over the production and distribution of cannabis to prevent illegal activities.

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Another critical piece of legislation that will be laid at the appropriate time is the Health Professions (Amendment) Bill which modifies existing laws to incorporate the medical use of cannabis. It outlines the qualifications and training requirements for healthcare providers who will prescribe and dispense cannabis, ensuring they are well-equipped to offer this treatment option safely and responsibly. The Bill mandates that healthcare professionals who handle cannabis must undergo specific training focused on its therapeutic benefits and potential risks.

Furthermore, the Hospitals and Health Care Facilities (General) (Amendment) Regulations have been updated to ensure that facilities equipped to handle cannabis meet stringent health and safety standards. These regulations specify how cannabis should be stored, handled, and administered within healthcare settings, ensuring that patient safety is always prioritized.

The Pharmacy (Amendment) Bill also plays a crucial role by establishing protocols for the dispensation of medical cannabis. It creates a new category of pharmacy—the cannabis dispensary, which is specifically licensed to handle and dispense cannabis with oversight from a licensed pharmacist. This Bill ensures that all dispensing procedures meet high safety standards and that dispensaries

maintain accurate records of cannabis transactions to monitor usage and prevent abuse.

In addition to these regulatory measures, the legislation includes provisions for the licensing of cannabis handlers across various categories, including cultivation, transportation, manufacturing, and retail. Licensing is structured to prioritize Bahamian ownership, with provisions ensuring that significant control remains in the hands of Bahamian nationals, fostering local entrepreneurship and economic benefits across the country.

The comprehensive nature of this legislation reflects our dedication to creating a legal medical cannabis industry that is safe, effective, and beneficial for patients needing alternative treatments. It represents a thoughtful and balanced approach to introducing a new medical solution into our healthcare landscape, one that considers both the potential benefits and the necessary safeguards to protect our community.

Madam Speaker,

As we move forward with this historic legislation, we are mindful of the responsibility that comes with it. We are committed to continuous monitoring

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and evaluation of this new healthcare initiative. We will ensure that it meets the current needs of our citizens but also adapts to future developments in medical research and patient care.

By passing and enacting these bills, we will provide new treatment options for those in need and also position The Bahamas at the forefront of healthcare innovation in the region. This legislation is a clear indication of this Davis Cooper Administration's commitment to enhancing the health and well-being of all Bahamians through modern, evidence-based, and compassionate healthcare policies.

Madam Speaker,

As I conclude, we stand on the brink of a transformative moment in the history of healthcare in The Bahamas, we are driven by a simple, yet profound principle: doing nothing for those in pain with specific debilitating medical conditions is not an option. Especially when there is a path to alleviate suffering and bring relief to those who endure daily challenges that most of us can only imagine, it is not just an opportunity, it is a duty.

The compendium of Bills for medical cannabis that we lay today is more than legislation; it is a beacon of hope for countless Bahamians. It is for those whose voices have often gone unheard; or those who have to travel abroad, cross borders to access the proven benefits of medical Cannabis that is illegal to possess in The Bahamas.

Madam Speaker,

These patients look to us, their elected representatives, to make decisions that can dramatically improve the quality of their lives. They trust us to act with courage, guided by compassion and informed by evidence.

Let us be clear: the path we propose today with the introduction of medical cannabis is one marked by rigorous controls, free of political colors and a deep commitment to public health. But, it is also a path paved with stories of individual mothers and fathers, who might finally receive the relief they desperately need. It is these personal stories, these individual faces that must guide our actions.

Madam Speaker,

We are here to make a difference, to enact change, remove years of stigma that has the power to transform lives. The legislation before us offers a carefully considered, responsibly crafted approach to introducing medical cannabis in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas ensuring that we prioritize the well-being and safety of our citizens.

Therefore, let us move forward with resolve and compassion. Let us show that in The Bahamas, we do not shy away from difficult decisions when they have the potential to bring about significant, positive change in the lives of our people. This is our commitment, this is our responsibility, and this is our promise to every citizen relying on us to provide solutions that respect their dignity.

Today, let us choose action. Let us choose compassion. Let us choose to be the leaders who brought relief and hope to those who need it the most. I look forward to debating and passing these bills and ask for the support of members on both sides.

Thank you.

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