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7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
8 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
9

10 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

11 Plaintiff,

12 v.

13 BRIAN PICKARD,

14 Defendant.

Case No. 2:11-CR-00449-KJM-16

DIRECT EXAMINATION OF  
RYAN D. BEGIN

15  
16 I, RYAN D. BEGIN, declare as follows:

17 1. I served for the United States Marine Corps from November 2001 until I was  
18 honorably discharged in 2007. I was assigned to basic training in Marine Corps Recruit Depot,  
19 Parris Island, South Carolina. After basic training, I was stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp  
20 Lejeune, North Carolina, until my first deployment to Iraq in 2003. After two tours in Iraq, I  
21 earned my ranking as Sergeant in 2006.

22 2. In my first deployment to Iraq in 2003, I was on the ground and actively participated in  
23 the Battle of Nasiriyah where my company was instrumental in rescuing U.S. Army soldiers who  
24 were captured by Iraqi forces.<sup>1</sup>

25 3. I was again deployed to Iraq in 2004 where I was injured during an ambush by the  
26 Iraqi insurgents in Iskandariyah, Iraq, about 50 kilometers southwest of Bagdad, when an  
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28 <sup>1</sup> More information on the Battle of Nasiriyah can be located online at  
<https://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/battle-nasiriyah>.

1 Improvised Explosive Device [IED] exploded near our convoy in an ambush. I was on the roof  
2 of our military Humvee, manning the “Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided” [TOW]  
3 missile when an IED made out of a large artillery shell stuffed with various metal pieces was  
4 detonated just as our Humvee passed. Some 10-15 Iraqi insurgents then came out from hiding  
5 and attacked our convoy.

6 4. During the ambush, approximately 4-6 inches of my right arm, including my entire  
7 elbow, was blown off by shrapnel from the IED. I was transported to the Forward Operating  
8 Base [FOB], where I was immediately taken to Baghdad, Iraq. My recollection of that event is  
9 *not* of the pain from my arm essentially getting blown off into another soldier’s lap; indeed, my  
10 strongest memory is being angry at having to leave my company during an ambush.

11 5. I was soon sent to the Bethesda National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland  
12 [Bethesda], where I had some 35 surgeries on my elbow before I retired and was honorably  
13 discharged in 2007. The surgeons fused my arm back together at a 45 degree angle and I am now  
14 unable to bend my arm at all. At any given time, I gauge the pain in my arm at a 4-5 on a scale of  
15 10. My wrist remains broken and my physicians have recommended further surgeries.

16 6. During my time at Bethesda, my physicians prescribed me a cocktail of opiates and  
17 numerous other controlled substances to treat the debilitating pain in my elbow, and at one point  
18 the pain was so excruciating that I took 100 10-milligram doses of morphine in a single day. I  
19 was also diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome [PTSD], and the physicians prescribed  
20 numerous controlled substances, including a two year regimen of Valium, Dextroamphetamine,  
21 and Seroquel. This period was the darkest time of my life, as I developed emotional and  
22 behavioral issues I now fully believe were induced by the significant quantity of contraindicated  
23 substances the physicians gave me. I was so “out of it” during those years that I once tried to  
24 fatally overdose on the prescription pills and, at some point, I lost custody of my only daughter.

25 7. In 2009, I began using medical cannabis in order to regulate the massive quantity of  
26 various prescribed substances that I was taking. I quickly noticed that cannabis allowed me to  
27 feel more emotionally stable and also helped me to appropriately manage the pain in my elbow,  
28 as it took the edge off the crippling pain in that area, but did not entirely curb the pain; this was

1 beneficial because I remained aware of the injury and thus did not overuse my elbow as I had  
2 done when the physician-prescribed narcotics made me feel almost comatose and totally unaware  
3 of the pain in my elbow.

4 8. I advised my physician at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs [the “VA”] Medical  
5 Center that cannabis was helping me, though my physician told me that I was not able to receive  
6 *any* medical treatment though the VA if I was using cannabis medically. My physician stated,  
7 “you can have the pills or the pot.” He then refused to treat me and, after two years, he instantly  
8 cut me off of the high dosages of controlled substances “cold turkey,” without tapering the  
9 dosage off to reduce painful narcotics withdrawals.

10 9. Now, even though I was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps, the VA  
11 physicians may and have refused to treat me if I use cannabis for medical purposes. This means  
12 that, even in a health care emergency, such as if I ever were to need an organ transplant or other  
13 life-saving treatment, the VA could withhold treatment if I use cannabis as a medicine. I am  
14 informed and believe that they would continue treating me if I used cannabis recreationally.

15 10. Without the medical treatment, and in order to deal with my PTSD and with the  
16 brutal pain in my right arm, I began consuming a greater quantity of cannabis and, rather than  
17 make my life worse, my life actually began to turn around. Though I still deal with some  
18 symptoms of PTSD due to the trauma I experienced in my two tours in the Iraqi war, I started  
19 feeling noticeably more mentally and emotionally healthy than I had since before my  
20 deployments. The pain in my elbow became manageable without the massive opiates or other  
21 substances the physicians had previously prescribed me. I began to rebuild my relationships with  
22 my family, I started to feel like a regular functioning human again, and most importantly, I  
23 regained primary custody of my 7-year-old daughter.

24 11. Although I was able to receive a recommendation for the therapeutic use of cannabis  
25 due to the pain I experienced from my elbow that had been blown off, I felt that the medical  
26 cannabis protections in my home state of Maine should cover PTSD, which it had not recognized  
27 as of 2009, although the voters of the state did authorize the therapeutic use of cannabis for a  
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1 host of other ailments in 1999.<sup>2</sup> I felt I needed to become politically active and get the state  
2 legislature to include PTSD in the list of approved medical conditions. I began working with  
3 other medical marijuana activists to lobby the legislature and I even personally met with the  
4 Governor of Maine to ask him to include PTSD. In 2013, our state legislature successfully added  
5 PTSD to the enumerated conditions for which medical cannabis is available in Maine.

6 12. I have worked with other veterans who have also had positive experiences with  
7 medical cannabis in lieu of the staggering quantities of narcotics and other controlled substances  
8 the VA physicians readily make available to others who have served our nation in war. My  
9 veteran colleagues, however, are understandably afraid to come forward in the same manner  
10 because of the harsh repercussions that could befall veterans, such as the threat of losing their  
11 medical benefits even in emergency situations, or of losing their retirements for their use of the  
12 cannabis plant, or even the fear of being placed in a psych ward for failing to comply with their  
13 VA physician's orders.

14 13. I learned that, on May 8, 2014, a spokesperson for the U.S. Veterans Administration  
15 in Colorado announced that the use of state-approved marijuana would not disqualify a veteran  
16 for healthcare, nor result in any sort of retaliation or denial of services in that State. While my  
17 experience has left me skeptical about this announcement, it has also left me wondering how the  
18 government can treat me different than my compatriots in Colorado based *solely* on the state in  
19 which I reside. As I am about to be married and my family and life are in Maine, should I be  
20 expected to move half way across the country in order to ensure I receive the medical treatment I  
21 earned the right to expect?

22 14. In sum, it is my opinion that marijuana has a medical benefit and that the current  
23 scheduling actually harms veterans who have served this nation but are required to take a barrage  
24 of controlled substances that can actually cause more damage than good in lieu of medical  
25 cannabis, or else lose the benefits they earned while fighting for our country. Due to the  
26 psychological and physical damage caused by the prescribed narcotics so heavily prescribed to  
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28 <sup>2</sup> See *Me. Rev. Stat. Ann., Tit. 22, § 2421, et. seq. (Lexis 2013)*.

1 me after my injury, I wholeheartedly believe that I would be dead or in prison without medical  
2 cannabis.

3 I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct, except for those  
4 matters stated on information and belief, and as to those matters I believe them to be true. This  
5 declaration signed on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2014, in Belfast, Maine.

6  
7 /s/ Ryan D. Begin  
SGT. RYAN D. BEGIN

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