

Honorable Senator McDonald
Chairman, Judicial Committee

February 25, 2007

Dear Senator,

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) strongly opposes the legalization of medical marijuana. This is in accordance with National ASAM policy on the grounds that there has been to date no critical research performed establishing its efficacy or safety.

Every symptom or disease, sighted by the advocates of medical marijuana, has other well accepted, appropriately researched, and medically approved alternatives for treatment. Included in these alternatives is Marinol, dronabinol/delta-9-THC, a marijuana derivative. Marinol has the added benefit, following well controlled trials, of having an established efficacy, side effect profile, and accurate dosing regimen. Interestingly the property that is significantly lacking in Marinol compared to marijuana is the central nervous system effects, creating the "high", paranoia, and confusion. For many patients, during trial attempts using smoked marijuana, the mental confusion and "high" is the primary reason for discontinuation of its use. To date there is no way to control the dosing, the contamination from other chemicals or molds, or the harmful effects on the lungs and immune system by either ingested or inhaled marijuana. There are at least 480 different chemicals inhaled when marijuana is smoked.

As an organization that is dedicated to the treatment of those inflicted by the disease of addiction it is ASAM's position that the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes would contribute to a far greater problem than it proposes to help. Adolescents using this substance already cite the excuse that it is safe because "it's legal in California" or "Doctor's prescribe it." Cannabis is often the first illicit drug that young people of Connecticut are introduced to, second only to cigarettes. There is good evidence that the use of marijuana on a regular basis in adolescence is a strong marker for ensuing drug problems later in life. There is strong evidence for an association between regular use of marijuana and a drop in scholastic performance, an increase in involvement with the juvenile justice system, and emotional problems in young people.

It is abundantly clear that the use of marijuana can result in dependency. There are physical signs of dependence and withdrawal. Individuals dependent on this drug are known to use compulsively even when their health, education, jobs, interpersonal relationships and legal status are in jeopardy. People come to treatment asking for help to stop their daily use of this substance. In 2002, over four thousand patients came into treatment in Connecticut citing marijuana as their primary drug problem. Over seven hundred of these patients were between 12 and 17 years old. These are only the ones that got to treatment. There is clear evidence that the *perception of harm* is a very strong deterrent to the use of drugs by young people. This bill would send the wrong message.

It would be an uneducated tragedy to lower the level of control now in place surrounding the use of marijuana. It will lead to unnecessary use of tax dollars and public administrative oversight and litigation in attempts to regulate its use. It is insulting that the advocates would describe physicians not in support of this bill as not "believing it is important to help people suffering." Please read those messages for what they are, misinformed and deceptive. The physicians of the Connecticut Chapter of

the American Society of Addiction Medicine strongly recommend you take a firm position against the legalization of medical marijuana.

I appreciate your taking the time to review our position on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

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