



March 14, 2011

Chairman Eric Coleman, Chairman Gerald Fox, and other distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in opposition of Bill No. 953. My name is Stephanie Spargo and I am the Prevention Coordinator for the Southeastern Regional Action Council.

Substance abuse continues to be an increasing problem within our communities and marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug. The more harm and risk that is associated with a substance, the less likely it is to be abused. Stringent penalties without a doubt deter individuals from breaking the law. Although lessening the penalties for marijuana may solve some issues with enforcement and prosecution, it will inevitably increase the rate of use and addictions. We need to consider the larger message that this law would send to our community, particularly youth.

Providing drug and alcohol education and awareness in our communities is a challenge as it is being faced with messages that market marijuana as harmless and natural. Decreasing the penalties will only reinforce the message that marijuana poses little risk and consequence in our society. This makes the work for prevention even more difficult. Recent youth survey's in Southeastern CT show that among high school students, marijuana is already the second most abused drug next to alcohol. The perception of harm associated with marijuana use continues to show trends in decreasing at both the national and regional levels.

Decriminalization will also increase availability and accessibility of marijuana to youth. Already in Southeastern CT, 16% of high school students have reported using marijuana in the past 30 days. This percentage will increase if Bill No. 953 is passed. In Southeastern CT adolescents are 20 times more likely to report using illicit drugs if they have smoked marijuana. This increases the likelihood that other illegal substances will enter our communities. Marijuana is listed as a Schedule I drug and decriminalization is likely to increase the rates of use and prevalence of addiction.

We must consider alternative ways to reducing the burden on the judicial system beyond decriminalization that will not increase social norms of acceptability regarding drug use.

Please consider how the decriminalization of this harmful illegal drug may negatively affect our overall society.

Thank you for your time.