



Testimony on SB 1014 Relating to Marijuana Decriminalization
Submitted on March 1, 2011
To the Judiciary Committee
By Calvina Fay, Executive Director, Save Our Society From Drugs

Chairman Eric Coleman, Chairman Gerald Fox, Ranking Member John Kissel, Ranking Member John Hetherington and other distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

We respectfully request that this testimony, on behalf of Save Our Society From Drugs, a national drug policy organization with members in the state of Connecticut, be included in the hearing that is scheduled for March 14, 2011 pertaining to SB 1014.

Save Our Society From Drugs (S.O.S.) has over ten years of experience in monitoring and making policy recommendations on drug policy issues including those pertaining to marijuana legalization. S.O.S. understands that a comprehensive approach to promote sound drug policy includes education, prevention, abstinence-based treatment, scientific research, and community awareness. Our members include doctors, researchers, law enforcement officials, business leaders, lawyers, and parents, just to name a few.

We have analyzed this bill and believe that this legislation will have significant negative impact on the state of Connecticut. Please take this opportunity to review our analysis of SB 1014.

Proponents of marijuana decriminalization argue that it is too costly for the state to continue to lock-up defendants for "simple" marijuana possession. The idea that Connecticut's correctional facilities are overburdened with defendants whose sole crime was the possession of a few joints is simply not true. A 2009 fiscal note attached to similar legislation introduced that year states that there were 8,118 marijuana arrests of individuals aged 18 and older in Connecticut in 2007, representing only 5.7% of total arrests statewide. What the report fails to determine is what the outcome of those actual arrests were. The state currently has diversion programs set up, and once completed, the offender often has adjudication withheld, or in some cases the charge can be dismissed.

Now is not the time for Connecticut to take a hands-off approach to marijuana use. According to the *2010 Monitoring the Future Survey*, there was a significant increase in daily marijuana use in 8th, 10th and 12th graders. Without the involvement of the legal system, assessments and intervention may not be available, potentially trapping Connecticut's youth in the cycle of addiction, especially for our most disadvantaged youth who could not afford treatment otherwise.

One must consider the amount of marijuana being deemed under this bill as small enough to warrant only an infraction. It is estimated that an ounce of marijuana can roll approximately 60-120 joints. Depending on the quality, the street price for an ounce of marijuana ranges from \$225-\$400. Adopting a policy of issuing an infraction for possession of this amount of marijuana would just be the price of doing business for dealers who would learn to carry smaller amounts on them in hopes of a "slap on the wrist" before returning to the streets restocked.

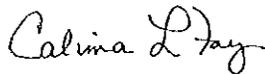
Marijuana is unique among drugs in that it is impossible to overdose on it, but that fact doesn't mean it is harmless for your body. Someone who smokes marijuana regularly can have many of the same respiratory problems as cigarette smokers. Persistent coughing, bronchitis, and more

frequent chest colds are possible symptoms. Regular use of marijuana compromises the ability to learn and to remember information by impairing the ability to focus, sustain, and shift attention. Long term use reduces the ability to organize and integrate complex information. Research increasingly shows that intensive marijuana use often meets the technical requirements for addiction (or dependence). More and more studies are showing addictive qualities in marijuana, and more than 120,000 people in the US each year seek treatment for addiction to it.

Finally, I would like to comment on marijuana as a gateway drug. Certainly, no one is saying that everyone who smokes marijuana will eventually turn to harder drugs, but there is a correlation between the use of marijuana and an individual's tendency to progress to other illicit drugs. In fact, the RAND Drug Policy Research Center Study, finds that there is a high incidence of progression from marijuana to heroin and cocaine and that the younger you are when you first use marijuana, the more likely you are to end up using cocaine and heroin.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. We would be happy to provide you with additional information or discuss this issue further with you, if you so desire. Please reject SB 1014!

With Respect,



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