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## **AGAINST SB 1098 – An Act Regulating the Sale and Possession of Synthetic Marijuana and Salvia Divinorum**

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sam Tracy and I am a lifetime resident of South Windsor, CT. I am currently a student at the University of Connecticut, where I am studying political science, and am a member of the school's student government. As president of UConn's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, I pay close attention to drug culture on college campuses, as well as drug policies at the state and national level. I would like to draw your attention to the two separate issues in this bill, which illogically groups together two completely different substances.

This bill first addresses synthetic marijuana. I will not waste your time on this section of the bill, as synthetic cannabinoids have already been banned nationwide by the Drug Enforcement Agency. It is unnecessary to ban them at the state level.

I would like to focus on the ban on salvia divinorum. I believe that an outright ban on salvia would be more dangerous than the drug itself, and that a better alternative would be to place age limits on the drug.

Salvia is not the dangerous drug that many claim it is. Overdosing is arguably the worst possible outcome of using any drug. However, in 2003, Dr. Mark Mowry of the University of Nebraska did a study in which he gave large amounts of salvinin A to lab rats to test its effects. He concluded, "the toxicity of salvinin A is relatively low, even at doses many times that of what humans are exposed to." This means that the risk of overdosing on salvia is incredibly low.

Addiction is probably the second-worst thing that can happen from the use of a drug. Salvia has been proven to not be addictive. A 2005 study by Yong Zhang in the journal *Psychopharmacology* demonstrated that salvia use does not activate chemical reactions in the brain that typically lead to addiction, such as increasing dopamine levels. The researchers concluded that it was not a very addictive drug.

While salvia cannot cause overdose or addiction, it is still a psychoactive drug. Surely something must be done about it, as I am sure everyone can agree that it should not be sold to children. However, banning the substance would just cause the well-known problems of prohibition. Its sale would be relegated to the black market, and drug dealers would take over its growth and distribution. It's possible that salvia sold on the street could be laced with other drugs, and people buying salvia may be pressured by their dealers into trying harder drugs such as cocaine or heroin. Also, the state would lose out on the tax revenues from the sale of salvia, and would instead need to spend money enforcing its prohibition.

As we have seen with marijuana, making something illegal does not necessarily make it go away. The 1996 study, "Trends in the Incidence of Drug Use in the United States" by R. Johnson, shows that only 0.4 percent of adolescents had tried marijuana in 1930, right before it was banned. Today, about 42.3% of 12th graders have tried marijuana. While there are many factors involved, it is obvious that prohibition does not guarantee that use will stop, or even go down at all.

The most sensible solution to the issue is to impose age restrictions on the sale of salvia. In California and Maine, you must be 18 to purchase salvia, and in Maryland, you must be 21. This makes it much more difficult for young people to obtain the drug. For example, in a survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, a majority of high schoolers said it was easier to buy marijuana than beer or cigarettes. This is because drug dealers don't card, while store owners do. Imposing age limits, rather than banning salvia altogether, would cut down on adolescent use while not contributed to the increased violence and astronomical costs associated with prohibition.

Sincerely,

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