



March 5, 2012

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in opposition of Bill No. 5389. My name is Angela Duhaime and I am the Community Prevention Coordinator for the Southeastern Regional Action Council.

The potential medicinal properties of marijuana are the subject of ongoing research and heated debate. However the FDA has not approved cannabis as medicine. In fact, new research in the past couple years has brought attention to increased health risks associated with its use. Long term risks include sleep impairment, chronic cough, and bronchitis, increased mental health risks such as anxiety, depression, and amotivational syndrome. Marijuana is addictive. According to the 2008 NSDUH, marijuana accounted for 4.2 of the 7 million Americans dependent on abusing illicit drugs. The most current research is exploring the negative effects on marijuana use on the immune system. There are other options available beside smoking marijuana to potentially utilize the benefits of the ingredient THC and they warrant further considerations. Other alternatives could potentially pose less health risks to respiratory functioning as well as possible risks that could be associated with second hand smoke.

We must let medical experts determine without question, that the benefits of marijuana use outweigh the associated risks before passing laws that could possibly discredit the ongoing process of research. Passing such a law without scientific conclusion of its medical benefit will have an adverse effect on the perception of harm of marijuana for all. Laws such as this send mixed messages to our youth making the drug appear "safe," "recommended," and "harmless." This in turn, increases the rate of drug use and the possibilities for developing an addiction.

Through school surveys conducted by SERAC in the past year, we have already begun to see a marked decrease in the perception of harm associated with marijuana use by youth. In turn, the rate of marijuana use among youth is climbing fast; 27% of 11<sup>th</sup> grader reported using marijuana in the past 30 days. **Marijuana rates currently exceed cigarette use among youth.**

On a personal note I would like to add that I have two family members who used marijuana under the belief that it had medical benefits. I understand firsthand the counterpoints in support of this bill but I would like you to truly consider what quality of life means. Does it include a loss of affect and emotion, increased depression and anxieties, dissociation from loved ones, and an overall detachment from reality? Perhaps we should be considering improved services and supports for individuals and families suffering from these conditions to help them become better equipped to cope with reality rather than "medications" that help them to avoid it.

Thank you for your time.