

Finance Committee Members,

I am submitting this testimony in regards to SB 1117, AN ACT CONCERNING THE TAXATION OF DIGITAL DOWNLOADS, BOATS AND MARIJUANA, AND EXPANDING THE TAX CREDITS AVAILABLE UNDER THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE ACT.

I specifically want to address the section of the raised bill that adds “pain” as a debilitating condition to the list of approved debilitating conditions for the palliative use of marijuana.

I am the chairperson of the Connecticut Marijuana Abuse Prevention Alliance (CT MAPA). On behalf of the group I am requesting that the Finance Committee remove this language adding pain as a debilitating condition from SB 1117 and to reject any attempt to circumvent the process the legislature set up when it passed the medical marijuana bill last year for adding new conditions for the palliative use of marijuana.

My concern is for the youth of Connecticut. Their peers in other states that have passed “medical marijuana” perceive less harm towards marijuana than before their state’s laws were changed. National, state and local research is very clear that reductions in perception of harm towards a drug lead to increased use of that drug among our youth. In fact, 14 of the 18 states with the highest rates of youth marijuana use in the country are states with medical marijuana laws. It will be very damaging to the state’s prevention efforts to change the culture of teen abuse of alcohol and drugs if the legislature makes a joke of marijuana use via so-called medical marijuana legislation for "pain".

Studies from other “medical marijuana” states have also demonstrated that medical marijuana laws have increased access to marijuana for youth in that state. In one such Colorado study, 74% of youth in addiction treatment for marijuana reported getting their marijuana from a medical marijuana cardholder. And just to be clear, marijuana is an addictive substance. Data from treatment centers around the country show that youth in addiction treatment are 6 times more likely to be in treatment for marijuana addiction than all other illicit drugs combined.

Since the legislature was clear last year that it is not safe for kids to use or abuse marijuana, we ask that the Finance Committee members continue to take that position on the side of CT’s youth, and not make our youth marijuana use/abuse problem worse by adding pain as a debilitating condition.

From a broader social perspective, it is critically important that the legislature NOT define "pain" as a debilitating condition. To do so makes a mockery of the "medical" reason for the legislation. "Pain" is far too subjective to serve as a standard for bypassing the process, which includes a medical review of evidence, for adding debilitating medical conditions as outlined in Connecticut’s law on the palliative use of marijuana passed last year. Anyone can claim they are bothered by "pain", and there is a whole range of pain medication already available to people who actually are suffering pain, and much of it is over-the counter and needs no prescription. This would convert marijuana from limited use by people with a serious medical condition to anyone who wants it as other states have found. Studies from other states with “medical marijuana” laws have found that medical marijuana cardholders are on average young men who are perfectly healthy, no debilitating conditions, with a history of substance abuse.

If the legislature believes "pain" should be added as a debilitating condition, they should require a review by the Department of Consumer Protection's Medical Advisory Board for "medical marijuana" on this subject and let the medical experts make this decision based on medical evidence.

Current research indicates there are serious health effects from marijuana use and at a minimum, the legislature should not find that marijuana is both safe and efficacious for pain without inquiry into the existing medical research and a careful examination of the health dangers, including the adverse message to our youth.

Recent studies have demonstrated that youth who use marijuana regularly do not do as well in school as their peers who do not use marijuana, and that the damaging impacts of marijuana on the developing adolescent brain are long term. For example, imaging brain scans have demonstrated that regular youth marijuana users have Hippocampus (part of the brain responsible for learning, memory and social development) 12% smaller than non-marijuana users. A recent longitudinal study showed that regular youth marijuana users had an average reduction in their IQ scores of 8 points. This could lower a person of average IQ to a below normal IQ.

Connecticut needs its legislature to consider our youth when considering laws about the use of marijuana. I applaud the CT State Legislature for passing the most restrictive "Medical Marijuana" law in the country. Do not take steps to undo the careful consideration undertaken last year when this law was passed. Instead, make the right decision for Connecticut's youth and reject any attempt to make marijuana more accessible to our youth by making marijuana readily available to thousands if not tens of thousands of residents with headaches or back pains.

The legislature has an opportunity here to help our parents keep their kids' safe, healthy and drug free.

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