My name is Danielle Ott, and I am one of the youth leaders of Guilford DAY, a local volunteer group jointly led by youth and adults working to change the culture of teen alcohol and substance abuse in our town. We have found that the youth leadership has been the key to our program. Last spring our youth group identified possible legalization of marijuana in Connecticut as the greatest threat to our efforts in Guilford by several orders of magnitude. I am not going to quote a lot of statistics to you, although I could do so. If you are interested in statistics, you should check some of the sources listed at the end of this document, for they have a lot. I will give you some case studies from Colorado so you can consider what legalization will bring to Connecticut and your own town. It will be easy to vote for legalization if you disregard the risks for Connecticut’s youth. It will not be so easy if you consider the impact on the kids in your own town.

Before discussing case studies, there is one other thing I wish to address. The proponents of legalization claim marijuana is harmless, and even beneficial for people. Even though I am still a high school student, I have checked some of the published scientific research on marijuana and I know that isn't true. The scientific research cited at the bottom of this document is very clear that exposure to cannabinoids during adolescent brain development can cause long lasting changes affecting learning, memory, motivation, emotions, and of course addiction. It should not be surprising to you that MJ affects the teen brain, but the general public has very little or no understanding of the risk. Dr. Nora Volkow, the Director of NIDA, a Division of NIH, states on her webpage: “The research studies have shown that exposure to cannabinoids during adolescent development can cause long-lasting changes in the brain’s reward system as well as the hippocampus, a brain area critical for learning and memory. The message inherent in these and in multiple supporting studies is clear. Regular marijuana use in adolescence is part of a cluster of behaviors that can produce enduring detrimental effects and alter the trajectory of a young person’s life—thwarting his or her potential.”

See https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/directors-page/messages-director/2012/09/marijuanas-lasting-effects-brain She also states: “Beyond potentially lowering IQ, teen marijuana use is linked to school dropout, other drug use, mental health problems, etc....Regular marijuana use stands to jeopardize a young person’s chance of success- in school and in life.” Furthermore, in a key recent study, researchers from UC Davis and Duke University reviewed data on a group of children born in Dunedin, New Zealand from their birth in 1972-1973 through age 38. The team found that regular MJ users experienced:

- downward social mobility and more financial problems such as troubles with debt and cash flow than those who did not report such persistent use.

- They also had more antisocial behaviors at work, such as stealing money or lying to get a job, and experienced more relationship problems, such as intimate partner violence and controlling abuse.

- In fact, in some aspects -- downward social mobility, antisocial behaviors in the workplace, and relationship conflict -- researchers found heavy and persistent marijuana use to be more dangerous than alcohol dependence.
A closely related question is whether legalization will result in increased teen abuse of marijuana. As a teen, let me assure you that it will, and the increase will be substantial. The statistics from Colorado over the past ten years as medical marijuana was commercialized with 500+ retail stores, and then fully legalized, led to a huge increase, giving Colorado the highest teen MJ use rate in the US. It is common sense that legalization will increase marijuana use in CT kids.

- Kids will believe the legislature would not legalize MJ unless it is safe.
- Increased access leads to increased use by all ages, including kids.
- We all know media attention and advertising works.
- Candy, brownies, and packaging for kids. Pot Tarts?
- A bunch of PSA announcements will not overcome the impact of legalization on teens.
- Big money is at stake and the people pushing this are devious, so they will lie to you.

Horrible Case Studies. At Guilford High, I have been taught that statistics will put an audience to sleep, but that case studies make the data come alive. The federal Impact study of legalization in Colorado, citation below, is full of case studies.

http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2016%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%

- Page 28 cites Kyle Couch, a 20 year old college athlete from Longmont, Colo. who was arrested and charged with vehicular homicide and DUID for crushing an 8-year old girl on a bike under his Ford F-250 pickup truck.
- In May of 2016, Quinn Heffernan, a recent graduate of Boulder High School, was charged with two counts of vehicular homicide and DUID when he rear-ended a 2010 Honda at a red light and killed two people.
- At 4:35 pm on May 10, 2016, Jacob Whitting, the recent Valedictorian of his high school class, crashed his pickup near Conifer, Colo, killing himself and two friends.

All these cases are part of Colorado’s recent marijuana automobile fatalities. Do you believe it is wise to bring tragedies like these to your town and state?

Case Studies on Disruption of CO Schools. I find these case studies to be almost as bad, because school and education are so important to our future. Student drug abuse in CT. already is an obstacle to education for many kids. Do we really wish to follow Colorado and make this problem worse? I am sure you do not want this to happen to the schools in your town.
“Teaching a lesson in class during first period that started at 7:30 AM and 2 students were already high in class.” Federal Impact Study p52.

“A male 13 y/o student fell asleep in several classes. He was interviewed by the school counselor and the RSO. He was assessed as being high and admitted that he uses marijuana often before school. He steals it from his older brother.” Ibid pg. 52.

“Many kids come back from lunch highly intoxicated from marijuana use. Halls reek of pot, so many kids are high that it is impossible to apprehend all but the most impaired.” Ibid p. 51.

“For school personnel, it is more difficult to evaluate what substance a student is under the influence of. We can smell alcohol and smoked marijuana but the edibles and vapes are hard to detect.” Ibid. pg. 53

“Last year I had two very intelligent students (above 4.0) that used marijuana 2-6 times a week. Both of them had grades decline and significant emotional issues spike in the spring of their senior year. They also both had violations at school.” Federal Impact Study at pg. 53.

“3 or 4 times in the last school year, students have come to school under the influence after meeting at homes where parents were absent, sharing marijuana off campus and then bringing it on campus. 7th and 8th grade students have been involved, and most often their reaction when caught is: ‘It’s legal.’” Ibid. pg. 53.

“Authorities are referring to marijuana as the No.1 issue Colorado schools face. According to Christine Harms, director of the CO School Safety Resource Center: ‘Our students are paying the price.’” Ibid pg. 59.

“In March of 2015 a fifth grade boy offered marijuana to another fifth grader on the playground. In October of 2014 a kindergarten girl described the pipe in her grandmother’s car and the store where you go to buy pipes. In May of 2015 a first grade girl reported that her mom smokes weed in the garage. ‘It’s not a drug, it’s just a plant.’” Federal Impact Study, pg. 52.
“I now have a warrant our for an adult for selling marijuana to a child and contributing to the delinquency of a child and the deal was made on Facebook and was sold at a business near the school. Internet sales are a booming business in the marijuana world.” Ibid. pg.49.

Legalization would bring this to your town.

I wish to mention two final points. MJ Laws Do Not Contribute to Mass Incarceration. Proponents of legalization claim that Connecticut’s marijuana laws cause mass incarceration of African American youth. This is not true. Since marijuana was decriminalized in 2010, CT incarceration rates for crimes related to marijuana have virtually disappeared. Less than1.2% of Ct.’s current incarcerated population is due to marijuana, mostly dealers. See the OPM CJPPD home page for the statistics on incarceration by controlling offense:

Do Not Approve Legalization Before Considering All Potential Costs - Before believing there will be a tax windfall, you must consider all the costs. When my mom was in high school, one of her Guilford friends, a high school freshman, was killed on his bike on Route 77 by a teen driver intoxicated by marijuana. If MJ use increases, in addition to fatalities, consider the costs to CT of paralysis cases covered only by Medicaid. The hospitalization costs for fractured skulls, broken bones, and massive burns. Consider the financial cost to Connecticut for detox and treatment of additional addicts, and the costs for educating additional suspended or expelled students. Consider the costs of all the additional schizophrenia and psychosis cases. Consider the social costs of alcohol and cigarettes and extrapolate that to increased MJ use and addiction.

CT should perform an objective study of projected costs of increased marijuana use in the state. This should include police and regulatory costs, as well as medical and educational costs.

CONCLUSION It Would be Shameful for the General Assembly to Knowingly Increase Teen Addiction.

Addiction is not a trivial problem in our suburbs and/or our rural areas and/or our cities. Addiction is a terrible problem for all income levels and all ethnic and racial groups. No town or city is exempt. It is shameful that some of our legislators would experiment with making Connecticut’s teen addiction problems worse via legalization of marijuana in return for a possible, but unlikely, increase in net income. Even worse is that they would knowingly preach the lies of those who would reap profits from the destruction of our youth.
Respectfully submitted,

Danielle Ott Youth Co-chair Guilford DAY. A FUNDAMENTAL DUTY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS TO PROTECT CT KIDS

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SOURCES:

Colorado impact study has a great deal of valuable information that the proponents of legalization try to "badmouth". Findings include the fact that the increased access to MJ, the advertising, the candy and cookies, etc. caused a significant increase in teen MJ abuse in Colo. There was a comparable increase in DWI’s and DWI injuries and fatalities. Schools were disrupted. MJ abuse and addiction leads to increased abuse of other illegal drugs. Absolutely none of that should come as a surprise to you, but those who stand to profit will not wish legislators to consider the facts from Colorado. The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact

Another excellent source is a 30 minute NIH video by Dr. Volkow of NIDA, of the NIH: Marijuana's Effects on the Brain, Body and Behavior

Law Enforcement issues are covered in substantial detail in COLORADO'S LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA AND THE IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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