

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing today to oppose efforts to legalize retail marijuana. I apologize for not being able to speak in person but thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony electronically.

As you consider the bill before you, I would hope that you would reflect on what is best for the health of Connecticut residents, and look to the lessons learned from the states that have already legalized recreational marijuana. As the parent of three children and substance abuse prevention professional, I am concerned about how legalization will impact the youth in our state. We have all seen that the biggest risk factor when it comes to youth substance abuse is low perception of harm and access/availability. Legalized retail marijuana will certainly impact both.

This is not your mother's marijuana - the marijuana in the 1960's and 70's was .5% THC. The marijuana we see sold in states with legalized retail marijuana is reportedly as high as 30% THC. There is no doubt that legalized retail marijuana for adults will mean more marijuana available to our youth. With increased underage access will naturally come greater abuse. Despite what some will have us believe, marijuana IS addictive and has significant impact on the developing teenage brain. Studies have shown that marijuana use by youth affects memory and learning, causing permanent changes in the teenage brain. Marijuana is the #1 drug for which youth enter addiction treatment - it is estimated that 1 in 6 youth who smoke pot will become addicted.

Connecticut already lacks sufficient substance abuse treatment facilities for youth; legalized marijuana will only exacerbate this problem.

When we look to states that have legalized recreational marijuana use, we see the impact on their youth. Marijuana use by minors in Colorado and Washington is higher and growing at a faster rate than the national average, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). More kids in these states report first smoking pot, last month pot use, and last year pot use, and we can expect the same thing amongst Connecticut's youth if we legalize.

I ask that you reflect on the impact that this legislation would have on our schools. As a result of the ever-growing opioid epidemic, schools are already struggling to put in place adequate prevention, screening, and intervention protocols to identify and help those students who may be struggling with the disease of addiction. From evidence collected in Colorado, legalized marijuana has created a tremendous burden on school staff due to the increase in disciplinary offences for students attending under the influence or bringing marijuana to school, as well as an increase in absenteeism. Many school systems in Connecticut are already facing a time of budgetary uncertainty; they surely lack the capacity to deal with an increase in marijuana-related problems.

I hope you would consider the risk of impaired driving on our roadways. Washington state saw the number of traffic fatalities related to marijuana double the first year (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety). Youth I work with already have a cavalier attitude about using marijuana before they get behind the wheel. I fear that greater access to

marijuana will mean more motorists driving while high on southern Connecticut's already congested roadways.

I also fear that we will see some of the other unintended consequences for CT business that have been reported in CO - workplace accidents and injuries, absenteeism, and increased disciplinary action against workers.

It is my sincere hope that Connecticut will remember the lessons we have learned from underage drinking - that despite the legal age and safeguards put in place, youth report easy access to alcohol from parents and older friends/relatives (with or without their knowledge) and from unscrupulous business owners. We should absolutely expect the same problems with legalized marijuana. There will be societal costs of legalizing retail marijuana; the tax revenue generated will never be enough to cover these. This is a lesson we can learn from both alcohol and tobacco sales.

I understand the temptation to see legalized pot as a "budgetary Band-Aid," but I urge you to consider the true health impacts and related costs that legalized marijuana would have on Connecticut's youth and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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