SB 1085

Good morning.

My name is Elizabeth Abernathy and I am a senior at Guilford High School and a youth member of CT SAM- Smart Approaches to Marijuana. I am involved in various community organizations such as Guilford Developmental Assets for youth, the Guilford Youth and Family Services youth board, St. George Peer Ministry and Parish Council, and an active volunteer at Yale New Haven Hospital. In my free time, I enjoy helping others and spending time with my friends and family, just like most other high school students. I am here today to speak against the legalization of retail marijuana in the state of Connecticut, as It is your duty to protect our youth. By legalizing retail marijuana in the state of Connecticut, we will not be helping our youth, but detrimentally harming them and generations to come.

People always say that the adults are the ones who are to take care of the youth and teach them to make good decisions and lead healthy lives. If this is true, then there is no doubt in my mind that every adult in this room should be helping us fight against this legalization.

I will not stand here before you and list all of the studies demonstrating the negative side effects of marijuana because there are other people here to do that. I do challenge you to really weigh the consequences and make an informed decision on this crucial topic. I am also going to tell you my point of view as a current high school senior.

One of the aspects of this debate that frustrates me the most is that we have legislators who believe that because marijuana would only be legalized for people who are 21 and over, youth would not gain access to this harmful drug. Just by looking at people in my own high school, I can tell you that this is incorrect. Right now, although

retail marijuana is not legal in the State of Connecticut, many students still have access to it and use it regularly. I see it every day in people that I go to school with. By legalizing it for people over the age of 21, you are just opening the gates for people of all ages to gain access as it will be easier to obtain. Is this really what we want to do? If you look at the ten states with the highest percentages of marijuana use by teens, eight of the ten are states that have legalized marijuana, and the other two have legalized medical marijuana. Of the ten states with the lowest levels of teen marijuana use, none of them have legalized retail marijuana. Guilford takes surveys of teen drug use every two years, and kids perception of risk from use of marijuana has been decreasing steadily since I have been in high school, and that will continue if the legislature legalizes marijuana.

The definition of the word, "recreational," is "related to or denoting activity done for enjoyment." By calling this "recreational marijuana," we are telling people, especially our youth, that using this drug should be done for enjoyment. Is this really the message that we want to send?

Some people argue that there are benefits to using marijuana. While that may be true for the treatment of some diseases, I truly believe that this is incorrect for recreational use. Through a friend of mine, one who has been in my friend group since 6th grade, I have personally been able to see the negative effects of marijuana use. This friend is no longer in our group as she is constantly withdrawn and uninterested. Her work ethic and attendance at school have declined and overall, she has negatively changed. In 10th grade, she began smoking marijuana regularly. Since then, these physical and personality changes have occurred. I have watched her go from a loving

and compassionate friend who went to dance every day and was very involved in sports, to a person who is almost unrecognizable. The use of marijuana only led to other drugs and risky decisions. I often wonder how she will end up and hope that she will be okay. I don't like to think about her maybe not being at our 10 year reunion, our high school graduation this spring, or even tomorrow. This is a realistic fear of mine, one that will only grow and apply to more people if you decide to support this legalization.

Just the other day in my anatomy class, we were completing presentations on various psychoactive drugs, one being marijuana. If, after doing research, one group was able to present the negative effects on brain development in youth and even link marijuana use to the development of schizophrenia, why is it such a hard concept to grasp for many others? If a group of students in a high school anatomy class are able to understand the negative impacts of this drug, shouldn't that demonstrate something to others?

I would like to thank you for your time, and I would like to conclude by stating that by legalizing retail marijuana in the State of Connecticut, we would be making this drug more accessible to our youth. Why would we give our youth an opportunity to use a substance that will negatively impact them, not only now, but possibly for the rest of their lives? Don't we care more about the health of people of Connecticut than that? Thank you.