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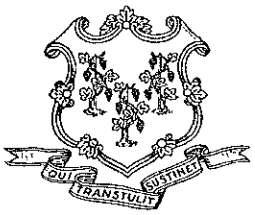

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
March 22, 2019

IN SUPPORT OF
Senate Bill 1085 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION OF THE RETAIL SALE AND POSSESSION OF CANNABIS AND CONCERNING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS IN THE CASE OF CONVICTIONS BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF CANNABIS
Senate Bill 1089 - AN ACT CONCERNING CANNABIS AND THE WORKPLACE
House Bill 7372 - AN ACT CONCERNING DRIVING WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF AN INTOXICATING DRUG

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafsrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for the following bills: Senate Bill 1085 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION OF THE RETAIL SALE AND POSSESSION OF CANNABIS AND CONCERNING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS IN THE CASE OF CONVICTIONS BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF CANNABIS, Senate Bill 1089 - AN ACT CONCERNING CANNABIS AND THE WORKPLACE, and House Bill 7372 - AN ACT CONCERNING DRIVING WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF AN INTOXICATING DRUG.

In 1920, our nation began what President Herbert Hoover called a "great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose" — the prohibition of alcohol sales. While alcohol consumption under prohibition initially dropped, it soon began to steadily increase, and the noble experiment created many new problems. The government had no control over production or sales, and an average of one thousand Americans died each year from tainted alcohol. Meanwhile, violent criminal organizations took control of the industry. Corruption became rampant in law enforcement, and the federal government was deprived of more than $11 billion in tax revenue.

After 13 years, the noble experiment was abandoned in favor of regulation and taxation of alcohol.

Following the end of Prohibition, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, under controversial commissioner Harry J. Anslinger, engaged in a sensationalist, racially charged anti-cannabis campaign. This campaign culminated in the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, which outlawed the possession or sale of cannabis. Similar tactics continued into the 1970s during Richard Nixon's "war on drugs." In a 1994 interview published in 2016, Nixon advisor and key Watergate figure John Ehrlichman said the war on drugs was created as a political tool to fight African-Americans and anti-war advocates. Ehrlichman said "We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

Cannabis prohibition has lasted 80 years. Yet, it has been just as much of a failure as America's short-lived experiment with alcohol prohibition. It is time we take the rational, common-sense approach to cannabis as we did with alcohol.

Legalization of cannabis makes sense for numerous reasons, one being that, as was the case with alcohol in the 1920s, prohibition breeds violence. Since drug-related disputes can't be resolved lawfully, violent conflict becomes inevitable. In a regulated system, cannabis will be produced and sold by legitimate, taxpaying businesses instead of drug cartels and criminals.

Legalization would also displace the illicit market for cannabis. As of September 2017, Colorado officials estimate that more than 70% of cannabis purchases were made on the regulated market. And the L.A. Times reported "Widespread legalization in the U.S. is killing Mexico's marijuana business, and cartel leaders know it." In fact, seizures at U.S. ports of entry have plummeted from 2.4 million pounds in 2013 to 861,231 pounds in 2018."

I am also pleased to see that Senate Bill 1085 includes significant provisions to facilitate the erasure of criminal records for individuals previously convicted of conduct made legal by the bill. This is an absolutely critical issue for communities in which have been disproportionately harmed by strict enforcement of drug laws. No person's future should be compromised for conduct that the majority of the population thinks should be legal.

And we know there is popular support for legalization here in Connecticut. An October 2017 poll by Sacred Heart University shows that 71% of Connecticut residents support legalizing cannabis. Furthermore, our region is rapidly moving toward regulating cannabis. Nationwide, an October 2018 Gallup poll found 66% of Americans support making cannabis use legal for adults. We know all too well that retail sales north of our border in Massachusetts have already begun, with several other states in the region ready to follow suit. We need to ensure that Connecticut does not become an island of prohibition as our neighbors move forward with common sense cannabis policy.