

I am here to provide testimony in opposition for the bill SB #1138. My name is Denese Marshall and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor in Westport, CT. I have run an Adolescent Intensive Outpatient Program and have worked individually with adolescents and adults with addiction. The majority of my adolescent clients I work with are coming in for marijuana addiction. I am not going to site endless statistics about THC levels, research on the addictive qualities or any of the rest of the information that has been regurgitated endlessly only to fall on deaf ears. I am talking to you today from the voice of a therapist, a professional, a concerned citizen and a mother of two teenagers. I am looking at this through the eyes of an empathic human and to tell you what I see first hand, on a daily basis.

The adolescents I work with are unable to stop smoking marijuana. Something that may start out as a behavioral addiction evolves into a means of self medicating, with an inability to stop. I hear EVERY day, without fail, from both adolescents and adults, that it will be legal soon, so there is no point in going through the difficult process of stopping use. If you choose to legalize recreational use of marijuana, it is GAME OVER for me, as a professional to have any hope at all of working toward rehabilitation with both adolescents and adults. I was running groups for people with a criminal background, and heard this time and time again, that it will be legal soon. As of now, I can use the argument that it is still illegal in the state of Connecticut.

To shift gears a bit, marijuana is a huge contributor to child neglect and abuse. I have worked in many cases where the children have to be removed from the home due to the parents spending financial resources on marijuana, resulting in an inability to buy food or provide heat for their children, being negligent and not ensuring their children are getting to school. Due to a reduced capacity to self regulate from marijuana use, these parents can become so agitated when they are unable to access marijuana, that they use their children not only as emotional punching bags, but physical punching bags as well.

It is heartbreaking to me that until one of you, the decision makers, are directly impacted first hand with a significant loss as a result of marijuana, nothing will change. The only reference I will make to "statistics" is that, based on the people in front of me, it is likely that at least one of you, if not more, will be impacted in a devastating permanent way. Whether that be through a suicide due to marijuana induced depression, as happened to a colleague of mine with her beloved son, or a car accident from an impaired driver. I just hope that it isn't your son, daughter, nephew, niece, grandson or granddaughter. When it happens, and it likely will, please remember how you voted to determine the level of remorse that is inevitable for you to feel if you vote for legalization.

By legalizing it, you normalize it.