TO: Co-Chairs and Members of the Judiciary Committee

DATE: March 2, 2020

RE: Testimony on Senate Bill# SB16: AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADULT USE OF CANNABIS

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Central Connecticut Health District (CCHD). Our agency has been serving nearly 100,000 people in the four member towns, Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield, since 1996.

In Connecticut, our public health agencies strive to Promote health programs and policies that support good health; Prevent conditions that give rise to poor health; and Protect our residents from health threats—the everyday and the exceptional.

Therefore, we oppose the recreational sale of cannabis and cannabis containing products in Connecticut. The comprehensive public health risks of these substances have not been adequately studied to date and moving forward with legalizing the recreational use of these drugs puts the residents of this state at risk to adverse health effects from both short term and long term use.

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years about the potential increased tax revenue that would result from legalizing the recreational use of cannabis and cannabis containing products. What has not been thoroughly discussed are the repercussions to the health of our residents. The primary method of ingestion for these drugs is through inhalation of smoke or vapors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that studies show that these drugs are hazardous because smoke from marijuana contains many of the same toxins, irritants, and carcinogens as tobacco smoke. Smoking marijuana can also lead to a greater risk of bronchitis, cough, and phlegm production. Smoked marijuana, in any form, can harm lung tissues and cause scarring and damage to small blood vessels.

Public Health advocates in our state were among the leaders in the nation to restrict the availability of tobacco products because of the health risks associated with primary and secondary exposure to smoke.

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Why would we take a step back from this significant public health achievement and allow another potentially hazardous substance to affect the health of our residents?

Additionally, it is also important to remember that marijuana affects children differently than adults. Since marijuana has become legal in some states, children have accidentally eaten marijuana products that looked like candy and treats, which made them sick enough to need emergency medical care.

Finally, this bill establishes a council to address the public health issues of cannabis products but delays convening it until 2022. By that time, many of Connecticut’s residents could be adversely affected by issues that have not been adequately researched, similar to the issues associated with vaping of cannabis products last year. EVALI is the name given by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the dangerous, newly identified lung disease linked to vaping. The name EVALI is an acronym that stands for e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury. As of December 2019, over 2,200 people were hospitalized and 55 deaths have been confirmed in 27 states, across all age groups many of them linked to vaping products with THC.

As a responsible local public health agency, we cannot support the recreational use of a substance that carries known adverse health effects and is contrary to the Prevent-Promote-Protect actions that public health professionals take every day to assure the safety and health of our communities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Charles K. Brown Jr., MPH
Board Secretary/Treasurer and District Director of Health

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