Testimony of NAMI Connecticut
By Thomas Burr
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Before the Judiciary Committee
March 2, 2020

S.B. No. 16 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION AND TAXATION OF THE RETAIL SALE OF MARIJUANA.

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Thomas Burr, from Glastonbury CT, and I am on the Public Policy Staff of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut, aka NAMI CT). NAMI is the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut, and its local affiliates provide support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for individuals, families, and children impacted by mental health conditions.

I am also the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from bipolar disorder, after 8 years' worth of repeated hospitalizations, incarcerations, and homelessness. Some of the best care he received during his illness occurred right here in Hartford, at the Capital Region Mental Health Center. These were services provided by DMHAS and funded by the State of CT via Husky. My son is now in recovery, living on his own in a condo he purchased himself, working full time; and has been doing very well for the past 14 years.

I am here to express concerns regarding SB 16, and the legalization of marijuana in Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut understands that there are both pros and cons to the legalization and sale of marijuana, and as such is neither for nor against this bill as written.

However, we do know without any doubt that legalization will signal to the public that it is “OK” to consume cannabis and will very likely increase consumption of this substance here in Connecticut. Marijuana addiction rates among teens in states that have “legalized” marijuana are 25% higher than in states that have not.1

We also know that approximately 5% of the population will have a very negative reaction to ingesting THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis.2 Many people with an underlying mental health condition will experience psychosis and end up in the ER and likely inpatient psychiatric hospitalized. I have experienced this exact scenario with my son whenever he smoked marijuana. If you have never witnessed a loved one in psychosis, be thankful, for it is truly frightening. For millions of individuals with these and other psychiatric problems, research has now shown that marijuana will worsen their already difficult state and render it much harder to treat.3

Connecticut should have no illusions that the legalization of marijuana will have any fiscal upside; it will absolutely have a negative societal cost. Therefore, we would expect that any and all revenue realized by the state of Connecticut from the sale of marijuana should be applied in equal measures to:

• Prevention Education, targeted towards middle and high school children
• Treatments by health care providers of mental health and addiction services
• Research into the effects of cannabis on the developing brain, and society as a whole
Thank you for your time and attention. I will now gladly answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Thomas Burr
Community and Affiliate Relations Manager
NAMI Connecticut


2 - “Marijuana Myths and Fact” - Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) Network: https://pttcnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/FactsheetMarijuanaPTTCFINAL.pdf