March 8, 2020

Senator Holder-Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Connecticut Psychological Association is against the bill SB 16, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADULT USE OF CANNABIS for several important reasons.

Cannabis is comprised of over 400 compounds, some of which may have important therapeutic properties. However, additional rigorous scientific research is necessary to determine which compounds, at what doses, and for which people and purposes (D’Souza & Ranganathan, 2015). What we do know thus far is that cannabis use is associated with 1) effects that are similar to a psychotic disorder, 2) cognitive impairment, 3) motor impairment, 4) increased risk for the later development of major mental health difficulties, such as schizophrenia, anxiety and depression, 5) worsening of existing mental health difficulties, 6) breathing difficulties, and 7) addiction with a withdrawal syndrome (For review: Radhakrishnan et al., 2018, and NIDA.gov). Evidence also indicates that cannabis may be detrimental to the developing brain (Orr et al., 2019), as the prefrontal cortex, a region responsible for decision making, is not fully developed until around 25 years of age (Arain et al., 2013). This is particularly important because the proposed bill would permit recreational cannabis use in those as young as 21 years old. Additionally, in states like Colorado with legalized recreational cannabis, there has also been a significant increase in accidental ingestion of cannabis by children (Wang et al., 2016; Impact of Legalization in Colorado).

Critically, there is no effective and reliable mechanism or test for assessing acute cannabis intoxication. Further, getting a driver suspected to be acutely intoxicated to a proper testing facility for blood and/or urine specimens would take time, and allow for the driver’s cannabinoid levels to decrease before testing. Further, there is not currently a clear guide to model cannabinoid levels related to acute intoxication and impairment. Thus, there is no way to detect or assess someone potentially driving under the influence of acute intoxication of cannabis, which we know impairs motor coordination, and may result in otherwise preventable accidents and fatalities, as we have now witnessed in places like Colorado (Impact of Legalization in Colorado; Salomonsen-Sautel et al., 2014; nbcnews.com).

It is important to acknowledge, that other highly addictive substances, such as alcohol, which has major physical and psychological consequences, is legal in Connecticut for those over the age of 21 years old. However, substantial and rigorous scientific research has been able to inform both the public, to be informed consumers, as well as the creation of sound policy which exists to keep our citizens safe. For example, knowledge gained
through years of alcohol research allows the public to be informed and responsible consumers - we know the amount of alcohol within each purchased product as well as the amount of alcohol in each standard drink, and the number of drinks per week, by biological sex, that is likely to have severe physiological consequences. We also have reliable and efficient ways to assess and measure blood alcohol content and knowledge about the expected effects across various levels of intoxication. This knowledge has further allowed lawmakers to set reasonable policy regarding the safe operation of motor vehicles. Research does not yet exist at this level for cannabis. The public does not know how much THC (primary active component in cannabis) they are consuming during each use, how the levels of THC may impact them, or to what extent physiological and/or psychological consequences may occur as a result of use. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge about potentially dangerous interactions between cannabis and other substances or prescribed medications.

Finally, given what we do know about cannabis, there are important questions that Connecticut must consider, such as, 1) How will Connecticut provide resources for those looking for help with addiction or mental health difficulties brought on or made worse by cannabis?, 2) How will Connecticut pay for the cost incurred from increased motor vehicle accidents?, and 3) How will Connecticut prevent children from increased accidental exposures?

Until the public has the option to consume cannabis responsibly and safely, Connecticut cannot allow the legalization of recreational cannabis. For these important reasons, the Connecticut Psychological Association asks that you do not support SB 16, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADULT USE OF CANNABIS.