Testimony regarding SE-16—An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis

Opposed

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I fully support expunging the criminal records of individuals who in the past have been convicted for possession of small amounts of marijuana. This can be done in a separate bill.

I am opposed to SB-16.

"If it’s legal, it must be safe.” That is how teens I know react to the push for legalization and commercialization of marijuana. What marijuana business people hope is that teens will accept marijuana use as normal and begin using at a time their brains are at a critical development stage and most vulnerable to developing a substance use disorder (addiction). This will provide marijuana companies with life-long customers. Marijuana business people are following the tobacco companies’ playbook. “Today’s teenager is tomorrow’s potential regular customer, and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while in their teens.” (Philip Morris, 1981)

Research shows that THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) is especially addictive for adolescents. Teens are 4-7 times more likely than adults to become dependent. That research is based on lower levels of THC in marijuana products than is sold today. THC can harm normal brain development, induce or mental illness or make it worse, lower IQ, impair academic performance, and cause violence. Research now proves that THC causes seizures, psychosis, and early onset of schizophrenia.

Paige Greytok, a psychotherapist in Greenwich, describes her clients’ reactions while under the influence of marijuana. “They talk about their delusional thinking and hallucinations, driving under the influence while hallucinating, becoming unable to move or talk rationally, and believing they are stalked by imaginary beings or possess super powers.” I personally know two teens who have developed psychoses due to marijuana use.

Why would we legalize another product that is incredibly unsafe for use by young people whose brains don’t fully develop until about age 25?

Yet too many Connecticut legislators continue their push to legalize marijuana, rationalizing that possession of marijuana will be illegal for those under 21. But legalization will further increase teens’ perceptions of marijuana use as safe. Just 20 years ago twice as many teens perceived marijuana use as harmful than do today. The greater the perception of harm, the less likely a teen is to use the substance.

The truth is that today’s marijuana is far more harmful than it was 20 years ago. THC levels now range 8-16% in plants compared to 3-8% in the 90’s. THC levels rise to 50-80% in extracts and edibles. Use of these high level THC products sends people to the emergency room with panic attacks, psychosis, and other harmful side-effects. Yet legislators have not even included
regulation of high levels of THC in their legalization bills, knowing the harm these products cause.

Driving “high” under the influence of marijuana is unsafe. Unsafe driving levels for alcohol can be determined by a breathalyzer. There is no detector for marijuana levels that law enforcement can use to determine if a driver is intoxicated by THC. In states that have legalized, vehicle crash deaths and injuries have markedly increased. 33% of teens in states that have legalized marijuana for adult use think driving under the influence of marijuana is legal and 27% of parents in these states thought it was legal (Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD survey).

What about working while high? How safe is that in hospitals, food preparation, transportation, and places like EB where people are welders, electricians, and in other occupations requiring intense concentration and precision? Defense contractors randomly test for drugs. EB tests hair, where marijuana traces are detectable for 6 months. In states that have legalized marijuana, one in four employees report being high at work.

These are just some of the harms that come with legalization of marijuana. Further endangering our children for more tax revenue cannot be justified.

Sincerely,

Karen Fischer

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