Date: Monday March 2, 2020

Re: Governor’s Bill No. 16 — An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis

Position: SUPPORT

To: Judiciary Committee

Distinguished Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of marijuana legalization. Having spent my career as a police officer, I'm now executive director of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP), a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals working to fix the criminal justice system. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the root causes of crime, building stronger relationships with the communities we serve, and exploring evidence-based alternatives to incarceration.

On behalf of myself and the thousands of law enforcement professionals I represent, I support responsibly regulating marijuana for adult use in Connecticut. In considering this legislation, you will hear from other experts about the societal consequences of marijuana prohibition and the benefits of legalizing and controlling it. Based on my experience enforcing marijuana laws, I stand behind these experts in acknowledging and reckoning with the human toll these laws have taken on individuals and families. Rather than reiterate their points, I'd like to explain how these laws have impacted my work and public safety at large.

I applaud Connecticut for decriminalizing marijuana in 2011. Doing so allowed officers to focus on what communities really want to address — crimes against property and people. More and more, people are telling my colleagues still in uniform that they want marijuana to be regulated for adults, not simply decriminalized. Their interest in using it personally is only part of the story: They know everyone is safer when marijuana is legal.
Over time, legal dispensaries and cultivation centers have and will continue to outpace the illegal market. As more states legalize, illegal sales and trafficking will continue to decline. Moving marijuana into a legal marketplace reduces crime, defunds potentially dangerous criminal enterprises that sell marijuana, and places a barrier between young people and marijuana that does not currently exist. Teenagers are curious and resourceful, so keeping marijuana illegal only increases the likelihood they will find someone to sell it to them. Dispensaries require an ID to enter the premises, and the few stores that have violated this rule faced steep consequences. By pushing out the illegal sellers and punishing the legal sellers who provide to minors, other states have limited youth access while simultaneously disincentivizing the sellers from providing the drug to teens — which further reduces availability for youth.

Laboratory-tested marijuana sold by a licensed professional, in a secure facility, and in childproof packaging is inherently safer than marijuana sold on the street. That's simple common sense. When a startling number of children began eating Tide Pods, we did not ban the product and send the manufacturers to prison. Our reaction, the most sensible one, was to improve education for parents and create more secure packaging to prevent accidental ingestion.

Not only do dispensary and cultivation applicants have to undergo a rigorous licensing process (which limits organized criminals from entering the market) but they are subject to regular inspections, quality control measures, taxes, and strict industry safety standards. If they try to hide something, we already know where to find them and how to check for compliance. Meanwhile, skilled police officers do not have to waste their time chasing ghosts.

A majority of Americans want to legalize marijuana. We have the guidance of other states that have legalized as well as an ocean of research and personal experiences from which to draw that support the efficacy of this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective in support of this bill to legalize marijuana for adults.

Police Major Neill Franklin (Ret.)
Baltimore Police Department & Maryland State Police Department
Executive Director, Law Enforcement Action Partnership

LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org
Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition