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Testimony submitted to the Judiciary Committee
By Amy Parmenter, Manager, Public and Government Affairs, AAA Allied Group

Testimony offered in Opposition to Proposed S.B. 16,
AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADULT USE OF CANNABIS

Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Amy Parmenter. As Manager of Public and Government Affairs for the AAA Allied Group, I offer this testimony on behalf of both AAA clubs in Connecticut, the AAA Allied Group and AAA Northeast. Together, both clubs represent more than a million members across Connecticut.

Both clubs are also longstanding members of Connecticut’s Statewide Impaired Driving Task Force.

AAA has a national policy of opposing the legalization of recreational marijuana due to traffic safety concerns.

With that in mind, AAA opposes SB 16 for the following reasons:

- **Marijuana increases crash risk, and legalization increases crash rates:** Marijuana impairs many functions necessary for safe driving, and research suggests that marijuana use doubles the odds of a crash. A 2018 Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study showed crashes up as much as 6% in states that had legalized marijuana for recreational use.
- **Law enforcement lacks adequate resources to address drug-impaired driving:** Connecticut has one of the lowest rates in the country of law enforcement officers trained in advanced methods to assess drug impairment.
- **Unlike alcohol, there is no simple test to measure marijuana impairment at the roadside:** There is no correlation between the level of active THC (the impairing chemical in cannabis) in bodily fluids (saliva, blood, etc.) and impairment, making roadside measurement of impairment impossible. At best, devices under development will be able to measure recent use — which does not necessarily indicate impairment.
- **Connecticut already has a drugged driving problem:** In an analysis of national crash data, Connecticut had a significantly higher percentage of fatally-injured drivers who tested positive for drugs other than alcohol, as compared to the national average - with cannabis being the most prevalent drug. State prosecutors say that almost every day they are forced to throw out drugged driving cases because of the complexities of proving impairment.
AAA applauds the ongoing effort by lawmakers to craft legislation that addresses the issue of drug-impaired driving that already plagues Connecticut roadways, and S.B. 16 takes laudable steps in that direction. AAA would respectfully offer the following recommendations that would enhance Connecticut’s ability to combat drug-impaired driving:

**Fund additional training for law enforcement:** Without a simple roadside test for impairment, the best way to enforce drug-impaired driving laws is with a Drug Recognition Expert (DRE), a law enforcement officer trained in the most rigorous methods of detecting and identifying which drug(s) may be causing impairment. Multiple provisions of section 10 (lines 277-281, lines 315-318) support the ability of DREs to testify in court, and AAA supports those provisions.

AAA encourages lawmakers to set aside funding for additional DRE training. According to the International Chiefs of Police’s (IACP) Drug Evaluation & Classification Program 2018 report, Connecticut had fewer certified DREs than all but five states. Funding would be needed not only to pay for the DRE’s training expenses (estimated at $10,000 by the IACP), but also to offset a department’s backfilling of an officer’s position during training.

While additional funding for training should be legislatively allocated, **money alone will not solve the shortfall in trained officers.** DOT’s Office of Highway Safety is making laudable efforts to increase the number of certified DREs, but classes do not fill up for two reasons.

First, to qualify for the highly specialized DRE training, an officer must first complete Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) training, an intermediate program that equips officers to recognize the physical and behavioral symptoms of drug impairment and helps them know when to request DRE assistance. According to a 2017 assessment conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, only 5% of Connecticut officers were ARIDE-trained – again, a lower percentage than most states. As a result, not only does law enforcement have more difficulty enforcing DUI laws today, but the pool of officers eligible for DRE training is limited. AAA would support a proposal to mandate ARIDE training as standard for all new officers across the state, with the eventual goal of having every officer ARIDE-trained.

The second limiting factor that money alone cannot resolve is the statewide (and really nationwide) shortage of law enforcement recruits, which shrinks the pool of eligible applicants further yet.

**Fund public education about marijuana-impaired driving:** Being high on marijuana unequivocally impairs a person’s ability to drive. Unfortunately, many people have mistaken views about the effect of marijuana on driving ability. According to a AAA Foundation report, 10% of Americans believe marijuana decreases or has no effect on crash risk, and 30% are unsure about the effect.

Americans are also unsure about how Impaired driving laws apply to marijuana. A 2017 survey from Liberty Mutual and SADD found that in states with legalized recreational marijuana, 33% of teens and 27% of parents believe driving under the influence of marijuana is legal, which is not true in any state.

And, a recent AAA Foundation survey found that almost 70% of Americans think it’s unlikely a driver will get caught by police for driving while high on marijuana.

For that reason, we support the education-related provisions of S.B. 16: