TO: Judiciary Committee, Connecticut General Assembly

Good (afternoon)[evering] Chairman Winfield, Chairman Stafstrom and members of the committee, particularly Senator Bizzaro who represents me here in Hartford. My name is Robert Pearston, registered and voting in East Berlin. I am addressing SB-16, which I am opposed or seeking modification of. I serve on the board of directors of the Connecticut chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-CT) but I am testifying as an individual father with lived experience in the hope of putting a face on the issue of marijuana use by individuals who are pre-disposed toward or experiencing mental illness.

Marijuana use has been shown to trigger the onset of psychosis in individuals pre-disposed to it. I will leave the science and evidence to Drs. Dsouza and Srihari who are available to the committee as expert witnesses and I urge the committee to call on them for details. My son was diagnosed as schizophrenic at the age of 14 following a period of heavy marijuana use. His high school years were filled with voices telling him he was worthless, despicable and needed to die. There were the nights he would disappear until morning or the next afternoon, there were imagined drug dealers and enemies waiting outside, there were incidents where he physically attacked me, which I never told anybody about for fear of involving law enforcement or triggering institutionalization. I wrote a lot of checks to psychiatrists, counselors and pharmacies. At that time insurance coverage for mental illness was spotty at best. Finding child and adolescent practitioners was and still is a struggle. I firmly believe that without the heavy marijuana use my son’s psychosis would not have manifested until much later. Normal onset is during the young adult years, after individuals have learned to drive, gotten through high school and developed some social skills. My son, now in his 30’s, still lacks those skills.

Legalized, commercial marketing of Marijuana sets it’s use as a normal social practice. It will inevitably lead to increased teen use, statistics from Maine and Colorado bear this out. If the committee cannot see it as necessary to stop this runaway train toward legalization, I feel it is incumbent on the committee to modify the bill to direct licensing and taxation revenue from legalization to education, research and treatment of the mental illness it triggers.

Thank You.