Testimony Against SB 16: An Act Concerning the Adult use of Marijuana

Good morning. My name is Kiera Stankewich, and I am a junior at Guilford High School. This topic of legalizing the recreational use of marijuana is very relevant to me, my peers, and all youth, regardless of what age limit is set on the buying age. I do not understand why there is controversy surrounding the idea of legalizing recreational marijuana...I do not understand why morally there is any question about what dangers legalization may bring. There is so much more to be shared and so much to be heard on why legalization is such a dangerous and frightening concept, and this is only a very small fraction of all of the reasons. In my school, in my extracurricular activities, in my confirmation class, in my Pilgrim Fellowship, there have been MANY speakers who have come to discuss how their lives have been and still are scarred, ruined, destroyed by their drug addictions. There have been friends and family members who have talked about the experience of finding their child, dead from an overdose. Different people, different backgrounds, but one common link: do you know what it is? You do: it is marijuana. Their stories mostly begin the same way: "it began in high school when I started smoking marijuana." Without fail this has been true (pause). From there, addiction and a need to get high leads to more serious addiction: this disease is an epidemic. Just recently, I was conversing with a friend who has a sibling in eighth grade (just a reminder that this means kids who are 13 or 14 years old). She told me that there are kids who are already smoking weed, at 13 and 14 years old! The victims of addiction are only becoming younger, especially in conjunction with the epidemic of juuling that is rapidly destroying our school system. Juuling, marketed by adults in the tobacco industry as safer alternatives to cigarettes with their fruity scents and convenient size, has targeted and deceived children into believing that they are safe. And because of this, kids are addicted to juuls, unable to last a period in school (57 minutes) without "hitting" their juul. So inevitably, if recreational marijuana is legalized, children will be deceived in thinking that it cannot be as dangerous as they have heard reinforcing the mindset that it is okay. And there "is nothing recreational about addiction." I have a 12 year brother in seventh grade just one year younger than the previously referenced kids smoking and juuling. How can I be confident that my brother's grade is clean? My focus is mainly on the health of my brother and his friends, primarily my brother. One of my greatest fears, in complete honesty, is that my brother will get sucked into smoking weed and from there, spiral downward into a life of addiction. I know that sounds dramatic and ridiculous, but if marijuana is legalized there is nothing irrational about this nightmare. When I confide in my friends, these
thoughts that keep me up at night, they tell me not to worry. That “he is too sweet and innocent.” That he knows better. That “it is not who he is.” After all, it is true that my mom and dad have raised my brother, sister, and myself with morals against smoking, drinking underage, etc. However, marijuana does not solely target those who get themselves into trouble nor is it necessarily a reflection of a “bad” person. Rather, if marijuana is legalized for recreational purposes and kids are thinking it is okay to smoke, anybody can fall victim. We have already seen this pattern with the juuling epidemic. How can I be sure that he will not cave to peer pressures? And why, out of all stresses I already have to handle, should this be on my mind too? The idea that legalization is such a close possibility is in all honesty sickening. Pot, weed, joint, party, FUN?? NO. Many of us think fear, addiction, disease, mistake, trouble. Is that really something that you are willing to support? This problem is closer to us than you acknowledge, and legalization will only bring more doom. I just wish that the safety of our youth could be considered more important than the economic and political benefits of legalization. After all, I like to think that we are worth more than a drug, but that decision, if I even have to call it that, is in your hands. You can’t support both legalization and the youth in this matter, so choose wisely.