TESTIMONY OF MARGARET WATT, CO-DIRECTOR, THE HUB,
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 2, 2020

Senator Winfeld, Rep. Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to comment on SB16 AAC ADULT USE OF CANNABIS. I am the co-director of The Hub, which is the state-designated Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO) serving Southwestern CT. The RBHAO’s role is to serve as a strategic community partner for behavioral health prevention, treatment, and recovery by assessing regional needs and providing advisory, coordination, advocacy and educational support in the areas of mental illness, suicide, substance misuse, and problem gambling.

From a prevention perspective, every time marijuana is legalized in any way ("medical" use, "adult" use), it erodes the perception of harm in the general public and normalizes the use of marijuana at all ages, which has a negative impact on youth who are most at risk from use of marijuana even when they would not legally be allowed to use the drug. In our work, we interact with public health, public safety, and behavioral health professionals at many levels and are constantly reminded of the many health risks (IQ loss in teens; increased risk of psychosis in teens and young adults) and other consequences associated with marijuana use. Due to federal legislation impeding research into Schedule I drugs, there is no solid body of research to allow society to fully understand the health impact of facilitating adult use of marijuana at a time when THC potency continues to climb and marijuana is being used in different ways (e.g., dabbing) than in the past. It would therefore be prudent to wait for more research. (To learn more about marijuana, please see our resource page at https://www.thehubct.org/marijuana or our regional profile on marijuana use in Southwestern CT.)

At the same time, recognizing that the Governor is moving forward with his initiative around adult use of cannabis, I urge you to carefully review the many points raised by William Huhn, a member of CT Smart Approaches to Marijuana, relating to various problematic aspects of the proposed bill. (See his testimony here.)

I also urge that any legislation that is passed require that tax revenues from marijuana sales are used for two purposes: (1) prevention education and messaging around the risks associated with marijuana; and (2) treatment not just for addiction but for psychosis. Cases of marijuana-induced psychosis have been increasing, and youth and young adult marijuana users who have certain genetic risk factors are more likely to develop schizophrenia. Our state already lacks significant investment in First Episode Psychosis (FEP) treatment, which is an evidence-based model used for schizophrenia and related disorders.

Thank you.

Margaret Watt, MPH, MA