

BEST (Bristol Eliminating Substance Use Together) is the Local Prevention Coalition in Bristol, CT. The mission of BEST is to work to prevent youth substance misuse and to help build a healthier community.

BEST believes that it is important to consider the potential ramifications of legalizing cannabis and preparing for them in order to reduce the harms to our communities.

The BEST Coalition feels that it's important to ensure that cannabis does not get into underage hands. There is significant and overwhelming research that shows that substance use during the adolescent years negatively effects the development of the brain.ⁱ Measures need to be put into place to ensure the safety of our future generations. The legal age is set to be 21, similar to alcohol and tobacco laws, however studies show that in some cases brain development happens until the age of 25.ⁱⁱ Studies also show that people who begin to use cannabis before the age of 18 are 4 to 7 times more likely to develop a cannabis use disorder.ⁱⁱⁱ

The BEST Coalition believes that the matter of youth cannabis use is a serious one and we know that by legalizing cannabis the perception of harm will go down and peer and community approval will ostensibly go up since our own state has denoted its approval by making it legal. In prevention, we know that when either or both of these things happen it leads to an increase in use. If there is any doubt, just look at alcohol as an example. It is the most widely used substance in the United States across demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds.^{iv} One could make the case that this is due in large part to it being legal and widely accessible. If the State Government legalizes the use of substances, such as cannabis, it will have an impact on our culture which in turn influences behavior and in this case substance use behavior.

As a community organization, we believe that if the state moves forward with legalization, we need to ensure the safety of cannabis with stringent regulations. We also believe that if legalized some of the money made from the legal cannabis sales should be invested in prevention and education programs for youth and the community. They should learn the consequences of cannabis use and how it can affect them in the future. Allocation of funds should also be invested into treatment and recovery programs, as well as, further research on cannabis. It's time that we stop treating people with Substance Use Disorders as criminals and instead start treating them through physical and behavioral healthcare lens.

If the main reason for legalizing cannabis is to generate more revenue for the state than we think we need to fully consider the costs that come with legalization. Not only the fiscal cost, but the physical and mental costs as well.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our concerns and suggestions.

Thank you got your time.

Sincerely,

BEST Coalition

ⁱ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana>
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana/marijuana-trends-statistics>

ii <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=3051>

iii Winters KC, Lee C-YS. Likelihood of developing an alcohol and cannabis use disorder during youth: association with recent use and age. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2008;92(1-3):239-247. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.08.005.

iv <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>