



CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONFERENCE
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Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, March 2, 2020
Testimony in
Opposition of
S.B. 16 “An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis”
by
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The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference, the public policy office of Connecticut’s Catholic Bishops, is *opposed* to S.B 16 due to the negative impacts the legalization of marijuana would have on the residents of our state, including those under 21 years of age. The need to raise state funds, or the desire to respect individual freedom, does not outweigh the negative impact the legalization of recreational marijuana will have on our society. Our state and nation is currently fighting a major opioid problem which has destroyed many lives. Catholic social teaching states that “the use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense.”¹ This offense is against the individual and society. The members of the Judiciary Committee must act to protect the common good and not open the doors for another drug related epidemic to develop.

Many individuals and organizations will attempt to convince the Judiciary Committee that legalizing recreational marijuana will have little impact on society. This is blatantly untrue. The more a mood and mind altering drug is used in society, the greater the number of adults and minors who will be negatively impacted. The fact that marijuana has a negative impact on individuals is once again shown in a study published in the well-respected British medical journal *The Lancet*. This study revealed that “Daily cannabis use was associated with **increased odds of psychotic disorder compared with never users...**, increasing to **nearly five-times increased odds for daily use of high-potency types of cannabis.**”²

The Conference believes that in addition to the increased cases of psychotic episodes among users the following factors can also *not* be ignored:

- 1. It is not the same as alcohol** - When you take alcohol, it has its effects, and then leaves the body. When you use marijuana, it gets into the tissues of the body and is stored in the fatty tissue of the body, which includes the brain.
- 2. Affects newborn babies** - The THC in marijuana today is four to five times stronger than in the 1980s. It can be passed on to babies in high concentrations in breast milk and has been

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2291)

² “The Contribution of Cannabis Use to Variation in the Incidence to Variation in Psychotic Disorder Across Europe”. *The Lancet*, March 19, 2019

shown to cause harm in developing brains. Research suggests babies exposed to marijuana in utero may develop verbal, memory and behavioral problems during early childhood.

3. **Sending the wrong message to teens** - Although S.B.1085 makes the sale of marijuana illegal to those under 21 years of age, the adult community is sending a clear message that it is not really harmful. In 2014, soon after legalization, young people in Colorado ranked first in the nation in marijuana use. The use and abuse of marijuana by youth increased by 20%.³
4. **Traffic Accidents and Fatalities** - Traffic Deaths increased by 48% soon after legalization in Colorado. 21% of those individuals killed tested positive for marijuana.⁴

In terms of the elimination of marijuana convictions occurring in prior years, the Conference recommends that this issue be addressed in a separate piece of legislation. The injustices that have occurred in the past can be addressed separately from the issue of legalizing marijuana.

Based on the factors listed above, and out of concern for the health and quality of life of the citizens of Connecticut, the Conference urges the Judiciary Committee to reject S.B. 16.

³ Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado, The Impact, Volume 4, September 2016.

⁴ Ibid



Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference

Problems with Legalizing Recreational Marijuana

1. In a report aired in October 2016 on Sunday's CBS *60 Minutes*, medical correspondent Dr. Jon LaPook highlighted some of the **problems** seen in Colorado that have increased since the state legalized marijuana use in 2014. This show presented a good summary of the issues.⁵

A. Not the same as alcohol

DR. MARILYN HUESTUS, NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE: *There's huge differences between alcohol and marijuana, and that's one of the things that the public really needs to understand is they think, "Well, we can take all the rules and everything we've set up for alcohol and just transfer them over." And they can't do that.*

LAPOOK: Dr. Marilyn Huestus, former chief of chemistry and drug metabolism at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, has been studying marijuana's effects on the human body for more than 25 years.

HUESTUS: When you take alcohol, it has its effects, and then it leaves the body. When you take cannabis, it gets into the tissues of your body and is stored.

LAPOOK: It can be stored in the fat.

HUESTUS: It's stored in the fat.

LAPOOK: How about in the brain?

HUESTUS: And the brain is a very fatty tissue. And so we know that it's still in the brain when you can no longer measure it in the blood.

B. Affects new born babies

Dr. Steven Simerville of Pueblo's St. Mary Corwin Medical Center, who supports an effort in his county to ban marijuana use there.

He supports the ballot initiative to ban recreational pot -- in part because he says he's noticed more babies being born with marijuana in their system. His observations are anecdotal, but he's concerned by what he has seen in his own hospital. In the first nine months of this year, 27 babies born at this hospital tested positive for THC -- the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. That's on track to be about 15 percent higher than last year.

"What does the mother say when you say, 'Your baby just tested positive for marijuana and it can possibly harm the baby'? What does the mother say?" Dr. Simerville recalled that pot legalization has contributed to the misconception that, because it is legal, it is not harmful for the babies of pregnant women.

- Today's pot is, on average, four to five times stronger than it was in the 1980s. It can also get passed on to babies in high concentrations in breast milk.
- The baby is getting seven times more than the mother, and that this drug has been shown to cause harm in developing brains.
- Research suggests babies exposed to marijuana in utero may develop verbal, memory, and behavioral problems during early childhood.

⁵ October, 2016 - <http://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/brad-wilmouth/2016/10/30/cbs-highlights-problems-after-marijuana-legalization-colorado>

C. Affects on teens and the developing brain

Dr. Simerville said there has been a 70 percent increase in teenagers visiting the emergency room testing positive for marijuana. That worries Dr. Simerville because evidence is emerging that heavy teenage use -- using four to five days a week -- may be linked to long-term damage in areas of the brain that help control cognitive functions like attention, memory, and decision-making. It's not known if there's any amount of marijuana that is safe for the developing brain, which may still be maturing during the mid to late 20s.

2. A February 2016 Boston Globe article highlighted other **problems** with the legalization of marijuana in Colorado.⁶

A. Law Enforcement

Law enforcement officials paint a picture of a quickly evolving array of laws, regulations, and ordinances that outpace their enforcement tools for related issues, such as drugged driving.

For one, they say, there's no quick, reliable check to see whether drivers are too high to operate a vehicle safely, as there is for blood-alcohol level. And there's no easy way to determine whether food products in a vehicle are infused with pot. "You have no ability to test the gummy bear laying there on the dashboard," said Chief John Jackson of the Greenwood Village, Colo., Police Department said. "Edibles pose a problem because there is no way to tell the potency of it, there is no way to test it in the field. And no law enforcement officer is going to lick it and say, 'Well, there's marijuana, THC in that.'" (THC is the primary psychoactive compound in marijuana.) Jackson, former president of the Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police, and other police officials said legalization simply moved much faster than law enforcement officers' ability to keep up with it.

Jackson said a fallacy of legalization is that it would give law enforcement time back to focus on more serious, complicated criminal issues and bigger drug problems. Two years and two months into full legalization, he said, "we're not seeing that."

B. Additional Impacts on Children

Another problem with edible marijuana products, said Dr. Michael DiStefano, who directs emergency medicine clinical operations at Colorado's only top-level pediatric trauma center: the inability of kids to distinguish between normal products and those infused with THC.

When marijuana is "handled responsibly, it's not an issue for children's health. The problem is a lot of these edibles," he said. "They look like regular candy. . . . There's no way to discern what is an edible gummy bear that has THC in it, versus a regular gummy bear. In fact, you cannot distinguish them unless they're in the package."

He said he's seen an uptick in kids admitted to the ER at Children's Hospital Colorado — to about 15 last year — ill from accidentally ingesting edible marijuana-infused foods since the drug became legal for recreational use in January 2014.

Indeed, the most grinding concerns and the biggest question marks focus on kids and young adults. But the effects of legalization on children remain effectively unknown with about two years of experience and lagging statistics.

⁶ February, 2016 - <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/02/21/from-colorado-glimpse-life-after-marijuana-legalization/rccuzhMDWV74UC4IxXIYJ/story.html>

3. Community unrest is growing based on a Fortune Magazine June 2016 article.⁷

Citizen groups attempt to put the brakes on the growing industry, a heated debate has emerged about the drug's societal impact. Doctors report a spike in pot-related emergency room visits—mostly due to people accidentally consuming too much of potent edible pot products. Police face new cartel-related drug operations. Parents worry about marijuana being sold near their homes and schools. And less affluent communities like Pueblo struggle with the unintended consequences of becoming home to this emerging and controversial industry.

Amendment 64 decriminalized marijuana statewide, but Colorado's cities and counties still decide if the drug can be grown and sold locally. At least 70% of the municipalities in the state have banned commercial operations, either by popular vote or board decisions.

"I'm getting calls now from people who voted for legalization thinking it wouldn't affect them," says Kevin Sabet, co-founder of national antimarijuana legalization group Smart Approaches to Marijuana. "They're surprised to see these are sophisticated businesses opening up next to their schools selling things like marijuana gummy bears. And they're angry."

But discontent continues to fester in poorer communities, where many of these operations inevitably land. "We were told that legalization would take drugs out of our community," says Candi CdeBaca, a community activist who grew up in the mostly Latino and poor Denver neighborhood of Elyria-Swansea. "The drugs stayed—and the drug dealers changed." CdeBaca points to, for example, an increase in school suspensions related to marijuana. And unlike the meatpacking plants and refineries that once dotted the area, CdeBaca says, this new industry hasn't brought her neighbors jobs. Instead, the money is flowing to outsiders.

⁷ June, 2016 - <http://fortune.com/pot-marijuana-colorado/>