

Hello. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the legislative forum at the State House this evening on marijuana legalization so I hope you will accept this email as my written testimony. Please share with the appropriate committee members.

My name is Mariah Sanderson. I am a 5th generation Vermonter, Essex Junction resident, mother of two elementary school aged kids and I do NOT believe that marijuana legalization is good for Vermont or for my family.

If we continue to legalize marijuana in our nation I believe we will soon realize it was the biggest public health mistake of at least my lifetime. Lobbying groups like Marijuana Policy Project, NORML and other special interest groups have been spending time and money across the US and in Vermont for at least 10 years, spreading misinformation about marijuana and downplaying the challenges of legalization. I believe that is partially because of their ties to the business industries that will profit from a new mood-altering drug they can market to Vermonters.

No one is being paid to get information out about marijuana science and industry practises like people are being paid to sell the public a narrative that says legalizing and commercializing the industry is a “movement of the people”, “good drug policy”, a solution to “the failed war on drugs”, “marijuana is safe”, and legalization is “inevitable”. NONE of those things are true and as I’m sure you’ve come to understand through this process, this topic is INCREDIBLY COMPLEX. It is short sighted and too simplistic to say that the only alternative to improving current policy is legalization. It was less than 2 years ago that we changed the policy to allow for civil penalties (instead of criminal charges) for possession of small amounts of marijuana - we need more time to assess the value and impact of that change. The US is the first place in the world to legalize commercial marijuana and I don’t think Vermont (and thus my family) should be one of the world’s test cases/guinea pigs.

If you’ve read the Vermont Health Impact Assessment of Marijuana Legalization you know that legalization does not bring good news for our state’s long-term outcomes. 10% increase in marijuana use among high school seniors, increases in traffic crashes, ER visits, mental health issues, addiction, treatment needs, and worsening academic performance. ([Full report here.](#)) Smart marijuana policy should recognize that marijuana use has ill effects on health and should be discouraged.

I grew up here. And after graduating from college I decided to stay and raise my own family here because I love the small community feel and the focus on health and the environment. This conversation about legalization of marijuana leaves me concerned that my community/state will no longer help me support my kids to make good choices. Legalization will leave me to fend for myself and my family as more adults will be openly smoking/using at weddings, private parties, private clubs, etc. VT also has some of the highest underage drinking rates in the nation. This is partly due to youth getting the message that alcohol consumption is part of recreation, celebration, and adult life.

With legalization of marijuana, the same will happen with pot use. My kids will see it in places they didn’t before. Law abiding citizens who didn’t indulge before because it was illegal may smoke now and my boys’ perception of the harm of marijuana use will continue to lesson over time. How will I protect them from other families that may smoke it in their home or allow it to be there in packaging or products that are appealing to kids? It is hard enough trying to raise my kids to make good choices in the face of so much popular media that glorifies and normalizes drug and alcohol use. I am scared about how to protect them from another mood-altering addictive substance that will be pushed at them and advertised to them so that companies can make a profit.

As elected officials I recognize the challenges you face to respond to what a sometimes uninformed public says we want and what good research and evaluation tells you supports the health and vitality of our communities. I want smart Vermont policy makers in my statehouse, who do the work to read and listen to well-informed, peer-reviewed research and who do not just give us (the public) what we say we *want* but should help us understand what we *need* to live happy, healthy, and productive lives.

I don't want to leave this mess for my kids. I don't want the increase in my taxes that will come from increased health care and safety challenges, and reduced workplace productivity. And I don't want these problems for the home state I love. Colorado now has the highest marijuana use rates in the nation-among almost all age groups. Please leave the #1 status to them.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Mariah Sanderson

"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." ~ Dalai Lama