

Please pass this on to all of the members of your committee as a followup to my testimony yesterday.

Thank you

Sarah Downes I wanted to expand on my comments from Thursday night.

I implore you to wait on any decision about legalizing pot in Vermont. We are a state that prides itself on taking the lead providing a safe and healthy environment for our citizens. We need to get data from the states that have legalized pot. As you could see from the hearings people quoted different statistics and facts, twisting it to fit their cause. The real issue is there isn't sufficient data from the states that have legalized. The statistics look negative towards legalization's impact on safety. Why rush??? Let the other states sort out the problems and get more accurate data that we can use first. Once the Genie is out of the bottle it can't be put back in.

I question the polls that say that the majority of people support legalization. People I talk to are dead set against it, but are quiet Vermonters who feel powerless to the pot lobby and the vocal proponents. When I talk to people who are for it they change their minds when they understand what the implications are for permanent changes in teenagers brains

One of my main concerns is safety on the road. Since there is no way to determine a stoned driver we are encouraging stoned driving instead of driving while drunk. With legalization we will see more people driving stoned, thus increasing traffic accidents and fatalities. You have outlawed other forms of distracted and impaired driving that you can measure. Please wait until law enforcement can measure marijuana impaired driving and a massive campaign against it has been waged. Roads in Vermont are much more challenging to drive without being impaired, than the majority of the roads out west, where legalization has occurred.

My other major concern is the message to our youth. As you know the brain of young people is not fully formed until their mid twenties and they often make impulsive decisions and want to fit in with their peers. The research out of New York University clearly shows that teens, which would normally be at low risk for using pot, would begin to use it because society has said it is okay when it is legalized. Is this the message you as a legislature want to send when we know the permanent damage that it does to the developing brain? The Montpelier high school students presented a small study from one high school. We need more real research before we take the risk with our future.

I work in a high school in Franklin County and we are already battling the normalization of pot through the messages from music, and popular culture and in some cases parents on the pot issue. Those students who are already smoking are not able to access the education that is being provided for them nor do they see the value of their education. They will never be able to achieve- like the polished well spoken advocates of pot because their brain and their motivation has been affected. The black market access they already have won't go away, but legalization will increase its availability. In the rural areas more people will be growing it in their gardens so you will not be getting tax revenue from a large swath of growers. That will not probably be such a big issue in the urban and suburban areas. Our teens in rural areas, party with people in their twenties so not only will there be more of it but it will be cheaper because everyone will be growing it. More teens smoking pot means lower test scores and higher educational costs. One of our state and local missions is to educate our youth. Since one in ten of those teens are going to have addiction issues, why would we create more obstacles for them to access that education?

I see legalizing pot as the biggest obstacle to improving educational performance that the state has ever seen. This will begin at a young age for many children compounding the neglect issue, from stoned parents with increased access to

marijuana to more youth starting smoking at a younger age as it becomes more available and normalized.

Please wait on this legalizing pot until there is accurate road side testing and we can see at least five years of data on the effect on our youth and families from the states that have legalized it. You have given people the freedom to possess and smoke it already. Please protect the rest of the citizens young and old.

I hope you will do the right thing for the youth and families of Vermont.

Sarah Downes
Agri-Science Instructor
Co-op Coordinator
Cold Hollow Career Center