



March 30, 2016

Hon. Maxine Grad, Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
Hon. Donna Sweaney, Chair, House Government Operations Committee  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Representatives Grad and Sweaney:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to concerns the Vermont League of Cities and Towns has with S.241, a bill which proposes to legalize recreational marijuana in Vermont. As you may already be aware, VLCT opposes the legalization of marijuana and believes the legislature should not expand beyond current law, where the possession of small amounts of marijuana has been decriminalized.

VLCT has serious concerns about the effects of legalization on municipalities, including the impacts on local school populations, law enforcement, first responders, municipal governance, and municipal budgets. The impacts on local communities cannot be understated, as the use, possession, testing, cultivation, and sale of marijuana will be wholly located in municipalities across the state. Interestingly, the Senate version of S.241 acknowledges the impacts legalization will have on the state as whole, and the need for resources at the state level, but those same considerations at the municipal level have been largely ignored. VLCT does not believe that marijuana legalization is a necessary or pressing issue at this time, nor do our member local officials believe the state is adequately equipped to address the litany of impacts Vermont will feel as the first state on the east coast to legalize a federally prohibited, Schedule I controlled substance.

As states out west that have legalized marijuana have shown, the municipal impacts are real. In Colorado, for example, schools have seen increases in youth use and exposure and visits to the emergency room. There have been increases in burglaries and thefts at residential, retail, and grow operations. Incidents of drugged driving involving marijuana have increased, as has the number of arrests for public display and use. Noxious odor complaints from homes and grow facilities have increased dramatically, stressing law enforcement and municipal ordinance enforcement resources alike. Communities have dedicated significant funding, regulatory effort, and human resources to hold local votes to prohibit marijuana establishments, to update local ordinances, building codes, and zoning, and to hire, train, and provide the necessary personnel to enforce local regulations. Communities have had to adjust to the new “marijuana tourism” industry that has landed in downtowns across western states, and local law enforcement have not been prepared for the mass exporting of marijuana across state lines.

Communities in Vermont will bear the deleterious burdens of marijuana legalization. Local hospitals, downtowns, first responders, schools, youth populations, employers, residents and neighbors, law enforcement, municipal officials, and municipal budgets will all be adversely affected by marijuana legalization. Strain on public safety and law enforcement will not be wholly left on the interstate and state highways, but also largely on our local roads, in our downtowns, and spread throughout our neighborhoods and rural landscape. At a time when communities are already struggling to address the negative impacts of substance abuse and illicit drug use, it does not seem prudent for the state to legalize a federally illegal substance. Stresses on municipal budgets and local property taxes are at an all-time high, and communities are trying their very best to deal with their normal day-to-day operations. We believe it is short-sighted to

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legalize marijuana without providing communities with adequate local control, authority, and revenue streams to handle the impacts.

The western states that have legalized marijuana – Alaska, Colorado, Oregon and Washington – all have robust local law enforcement presences in their communities. Vermont has towns that are 50 miles from the nearest police barracks or neighboring municipal police department. Municipal budgets in those western states are much larger, and access to resources from state government is greater. All four states also enjoy “Home Rule” legal authority and all four states provide for local taxing authority. Yet even with these resources, local autonomy, and authority, our western municipal counterparts tell us that they need more resources to address the wide range of negative fallout on local communities.

VLCT strongly urges the legislature to not move forward with legalization at this time. Municipalities and the state are ill-equipped and unprepared to handle the range of issues marijuana legalization will pose. Much more time, honest dialogue with impacted parties, and greater critical analysis are necessary before Vermont determines that marijuana legalization is the prudent move forward for the state as a whole. The legislature should not legalize marijuana in Vermont until it can ensure that all local communities in the state have the autonomy, the legal authority, and all the resources necessary to handle the impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this pending legislation. VLCT looks forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Gwynn Zakov, Esq.  
Public Policy Advocate