

To: House Members:

From: Linda Mulley, Norwich, Vermont

I regret I can't be there in person to testify as a parent against passage of bill S.241 but health issues interfere. In lieu of personal testimony, I hope you will read this letter and consider its message. I am also sending separately excerpts from a note from my daughter's birth father (a recovered addict) who describes his thoughts on the subject. I hope you will also read this. His is a strong voice. Thank you!

With the first anniversary of my 38 year old daughter's death from substance abuse (multiple drug intoxication) just past*, I find myself stunned by Vermont's serious consideration of a bill to legalize marijuana for recreational purposes. Having followed this discussion now for many months and addressing it as I've been able with state and federal senators (including supporter Bernie Sanders), our local representatives, and the governor, I've received disappointingly few responses. Comments on the Internet to my objections to legalization have been vitriolic, and I long ago stopped engaging in this way. There clearly is a very vocal base of support for this measure although it is far less clear how representative that base really is.

There has much discussion regarding pros and cons of legalizing marijuana over the past months. **However, as a parent whose child died from the disease of addiction, I feel I have to try again to share my daughter's personal experience with this drug. From her journals, there is no question that marijuana was, along with alcohol, a drug of choice and that she was "psychologically" addicted to it – she first encountered it in high school and continued smoking it until she died. From her birth parents, she inherited genes that predisposed her to addiction, and smoking weed was one of her portals into far more destructive and, in her case, lethal drug and alcohol behavior.**

I am also the mother of an 18 year old son who has suffered greatly from the loss of his sister. I fear for him and his friends (and all teens and young adults in Vermont and other states who will come here to purchase it) should this bill pass. **The message to our kids of all ages will be one of general acceptance by our community and this will surely have a psychological effect on them. Although we know that kids can and do find sources for the drug, they will surely have much easier access than they have now. The coupling of those two elements – okay to do, let's go get some or get someone to get us some – feels ominous to me and I hope it may to you as well.**

Let's do acknowledge that the marijuana available these days barely resembles the tame weed people smoked in their youth. It's now become a highly potent drug that can impair judgment and disinhibit minds that are not fully developed until their early twenties. Having met many parents (in person and online) whose children have died from substance abuse, very few do not include marijuana in the inexorable march toward experimenting with and using more dangerous substances. **In describing their experiences and my daughter's addictive pattern, I am not suggesting that every person who uses marijuana will become an addict. Simply, that some surely will, and already, for those people, there are long waiting lists, limited resources, and inadequate treatment options available to them.**

Few people disagree that new approaches are needed to help solve the drug problem in our country and state. I am very familiar with the pro arguments – tax revenues, regulation, etc. and, were those revenues really used for education and treatment, some benefit could accrue. **However, it seems illogical to me that as part of that approach, we would actually legitimize a drug whose effects on a maturing brain are poorly understood and for which little data exists to prove that legalization would not be harmful, especially to our most vulnerable population. In fact, as data comes in from Colorado, real problems are now associated with broad-scale legalization. And I think it does matter that most drug enforcement professionals in our state are not in favor of legalization – so why are we not listening to them?** They are concerned about drivers – young and old – under the influence of a drug that is known to impair judgment and reflexes. And without a clear standard or reliable test that can accurately evaluate how impaired or intoxicated a drugged driver is, we are all at risk.

It is important to remember that there is a big difference between decriminalizing and legalizing. Clearly, a person who can benefit medically from marijuana in any form should have easy and sanctioned access to it. And should people be imprisoned for growing or having a small amount of pot in their possession? Definitely not. **But it's a huge leap from making it *not* a criminal act to possess small amounts to actually making the drug available legally to the population as a whole.**

Those who support waiting for more data from states that have taken this bold step are, in my opinion, both tempered and wise. Why must Vermont take the lead on this issue? I have lived in this state since 1968 and have been proud of its legacy. But I feel no pride in our stand on this issue, and, if you feel similarly, **I urge you to vote Nay on this bill, at least until more data can be collected and analyzed, and more importantly, until waiting lists for treatment for substance abuse are replaced by more treatment centers and options. To Vermont and to all of you as our representatives, I must ask: What's the rush?**

Thank you!

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*Here is the link to the article I wrote about my daughter published in the Valley News, Vermont Digger and elsewhere in the fall:

<http://www.vnews.com/home/18955201-95/not-one-more-after-her-daughters-death-a-mother-grieves-and-appeals-for-a>