

Begin forwarded message:

From: Barbara Rachelson <BRachelson@leg.state.vt.us>
Date: March 21, 2016 at 2:21:48 PM EDT
To: "barbara.rachelson@gmail.com" <barbara.rachelson@gmail.com>
Subject: FW: S 241-marijuana legalization

From: Margo Austin
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 2:21:42 PM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Barbara Rachelson; barbara.rachelson@gmail.com
Subject: S 241-marijuana legalization

Hi Barbara,

Hope this email finds you well! Thank you for all the work you do in Montpelier on behalf of Vermonters. I thought I was testifying in the House Judiciary Committee this week but it does not appear that I am on the schedule. In case I do not get the opportunity, I wanted to reach out as the current SAP Counselor at BHS and years in the field of addiction and express my deep concerns about S241.

I take the work that I do incredibly seriously and am passionate about creating communities that promote health, value safety and protect youth. As you are aware, for over 2 decades I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with 12-21 year old youth in schools in Vermont. I worked at CVU, Shelburne and Charlotte as well as coordinating the entire SAP Program through Spectrum Youth and Family Service (19 schools and 12 staff). Currently I work at Burlington High School as an SAP Counselor meeting with hundreds of youth every year.

I continued to be frustrated and perplexed by the statement made by politicians that marijuana is more easy to get than alcohol. That is factually incorrect. As a matter of fact, this summer when Governor Shumlin made the same statement he was corrected the next day in the Free Press. I am sure you are familiar with the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) done every 2 years in Vermont? Consistently and not surprisingly, alcohol is the easiest drug for kids to access....why? Because it is in almost every home. When I go to health classes I ask every health class how many of you have alcohol in your home and you know where it is kept? 90-100% of hands go up. Now, for the most part, kids don't bring alcohol to school....why? Hard to conceal, easy to detect....pot is way easier to hide, conceal and use (especially now with vape pens!). Kids are SOOOO influenced by media and public perception. Of course they will say that marijuana is easiest to get....look at the messages they are hearing about marijuana in our media! "Prohibition is a failed policy and pot is easier to get than alcohol." If you hear something enough-you will believe it!

Furthermore, when I go into health classes- TONS of them, I ask what drug is MOST commonly used? Students will often shout out heroin without even thinking....why would they say that? Think about how much they hear about heroin in the media. It is not a surprising answer even though it is totally inaccurate.

We have a HUGE problem with marijuana perception of harm which is basically non-existent and legalization will only further the rationalization that it is safe-by both youth and adults. Nothing about commercialization and a "tightly regulated market" makes any sense. Look at Colorado: **#1 in every age category for marijuana use post legalization!** If regulation was such a success, why wouldn't Colorado be near the bottom??-certainly not #1 for every age category-even 12-17 year olds with incredibly vulnerable brains.

I have testified in the Senate twice. This is not an expectation of my job but a deep desire to make sure we create policies that work towards better health and safety and this bill does not achieve that. There are SO many myths about marijuana...frankly, in my professional opinion, there is no other drug that is more rationalized, revered and misunderstood than marijuana. Meanwhile, the pro-side is a well funded, well orchestrated machine that has been very successful in creating a false narrative that is not easy to challenge without significant financial resources.

Unlike the pro side my motives are pure and clear. I care about the health and safety of all Vermonters-especially the populations that need the most protections-our youth. I fail to see how moving now on S241 will achieve these goals.

I worked for over 6 months on a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), on Marijuana. This document is 84 pages long, but I have isolated 2 pages that say plenty attached to this email.

http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/healthassessments/documents/HIA_marijuana_regulation_in_vermont_201601.pdf

Here we are in VT in a health crisis with opioids and the most troubling part about that is the new science showing a strong [opioid-cannabinoid neuropathway link](#) in the brain that could in fact mean early brain exposure to marijuana increases one risks to opiate addiction later in life. The [epi-genetic science](#) now coming out is most alarming and certainly should be further researched before we go any further on this movement to open a legal recreational pot market

Let me know if you have any questions!

I have written many ideas of WHAT to do into my testimony but also want to highlight some here:

- Prioritize the health and wellness of our youth. Adequately fund prevention, intervention and treatment services. We are not doing this right now. Vermont had way more services in schools and communities approximately 5-7 years ago. We were on the right track...lets bring it back!
- Revenue Sources?? Alcohol? My understanding is the beer tax has not been raised since the 1980's??
- Challenge BOTH the scare tactics AND the glamorization of marijuana. Neither are true! Challenge both with on-going education, accurate information that is consistent and not confusing to everyone-smoking cigarettes is "bad" smoking pot="organic"?! To illustrate my point, I was at the University Mall in South Burlington yesterday check out the image. This is what is being "said" about pot.
- Challenge the commercialization/marketing of any psycho-active substance with a focus on media literacy and effective/well funded Public Service Announcements (PSA's) that are just as "cool and hip" as a Budweiser ad! The alcohol and tobacco industry spend millions on ads....why? Because they work!

IN SCHOOLS: Prioritize Health (mental and physical) as much as academics. Without health you can't "do" academics anyway. Reinstate pieces of ACT 51. NO longer are teachers in Vermont trained on addiction/mental health/intervention/ etc. It used to be required-that is no longer the case.

I am attaching both of my testimonies, 2 pages of the HIA, and the latest ways marijuana is "smoked."

I am happy to talk with you further and share how I have arrived at this place after two decades working in the field and coming in contact with thousands of youth!

I appreciate that these issues are incredibly complex which is why I would urge you to take your time and **do not legalize another addictive, psycho-active substance.**

I know you care deeply about what is best for Vermont youth and adults when it comes to health and safety!

Thank you!

Best,

Margo Austin, Med, LADC

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Margo Austin
Student Assistance Program Counselor
Burlington High School
52 Institute Road
Burlington, VT 05408
Tuesday-Friday
802-540-1724 (direct line)