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Chrissy Gilhuly
Committee Assistant
Senate Health & Welfare, Room 17
115 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Re: S.241 Cannabis Regulation

To the Chair, Vice-Chair and Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

Please accept this written testimony on the taxation and regulation of cannabis in Vermont. This is the opinion of the writer alone and does not represent any group or organization with which the writer is affiliated. This perspective based on the writer's experience in long term recovery from addiction (including cannabis addiction), in training hundreds of healthcare providers over the past 20 years in the recognition and treatment of addictions, and as a mental health and addiction treatment provider over the past 20 years.

The points raised are meant to be neutral on whether the bill does or does not pass. The following issues may warrant consideration in determining the advantages and disadvantages of the passage of this legislation:

1. Regulation of THC content – There are different forms of cannabis derivatives, that would be legal under the current bill, which contain up to 90% pure THC (the psychoactive chemical in cannabis). “Dabbing” or “Shatter” and other concentrated cannabis products may present a public health and safety issue (production of “shatter” involves using butane gas that can cause explosions) that may be underestimated. Cannabis regulation could limit THC content to under 40% THC, regardless of the concentration of other compounds (such as CBD or Cannabidiol)
2. Youth Prevention and Education – This section of the bill needs to be stronger and more inclusive. The fact is that legalization of cannabis will have deleterious public health effects for *all ages*. Policymakers may consider a *large allocation of funds from any cannabis-related revenue to addiction Recognition, Treatment, Education and Recovery and Mental Health needs of all Vermonters*. Youth may be of particular concern to many and soon become young and older adults with a variety of mental health and addiction needs, regardless of whether or not it can be traced to adolescent drug use.
3. Cannabis Lounges and Alcohol – It is not clear in the bill whether newly created cannabis lounges may also serve alcohol. The combined use of alcohol and cannabis causes significantly more impaired than either substance alone for most people. A lack of regulation around this issue is short-sighted at best, especially any penalties for laws that are broken, such as possession or driving, when under the influence of both substances. Furthermore, the Netherlands has recently begun to change their “coffee shop” rules due to an increase in problems associated with those establishments.
4. Reduction of Black Market Activity and 100sq. ft. Limit – This may be the weakest aspect of the bill. Revenue may not be maintained over time from the retail sale of cannabis products if people are legally permitted to use a 10x10 space in or outside their home to grow cannabis plants. This will drive up black market sales or trades (friends helping friends) and drive down costs of retail products.

This is a summary of issues that have, can and should be addressed in considering this legislation. In person testimony can be arranged if requested. This document may be shared with other legislative committees.

Thank you, Rick Barnett, Psy.D., LADC