

April 25, 2018

Dear Representative Tucker:

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my concern regarding legislation of marijuana. I am a local physician, I have lived and practiced in Vermont for nearly 30 years. I have delivered over 2,000 babies in the Burlington area.

I have witnessed the devastating effects of addiction in our community. I care for many patients attempting to recover from substance abuse. Virtually all of these individuals began their substance abuse with marijuana. I am sure you are aware the cost to our health system to treat addiction. This cost far outweighs any income that expansion of our medical marijuana taxes can bring in. Further our system is already completely overwhelmed, we cannot afford as a community to treat more problems of addiction.

I am concerned that more widespread appearance, with more retail outlets, may give the appearance to young people that marijuana is safe. I have visited California frequently, I am appalled at seeing a marijuana dispensary on every street corner. You cannot say that wide spread availability will not increase more use by adolescents. Advertising and availability will put more young Vermonters at risk, especially young patients.

As a parent, I recently lost my son to accidental overdose. He had a history of bipolar disorder. All of his manic episodes were triggered by pot use. He had a rapid decline in mental health starting at age 17. He showed improvement with abstinence and then had a significantly worsening course that included use of stronger drugs. His manic episodes became more frequent and severe, eventually his medications didn't help. He accidentally took fentanyl with large amounts of marijuana and alcohol in his system. His artwork and poetry were on display at the Statehouse cafeteria 2 months ago.

I have met many other parents of children with mental illness locally, through parent support groups. The number of our kids afflicted with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia is frightening. Many, also, have triggering of their illness with use of pot..

Vermont is already widely known for it's high rate of alcohol, opiate and marijuana use. I would prefer our state be known for it's beauty and social programs.

Sincerely,

Kimberly D. Blake MD