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House Committee on Human Services
Representative Ann Pugh, Chair
Vermont State House
Montpelier

Re: Youth Drug Education and Prevention

Dear Chairperson Pugh and Members of the House Committee on Human Services:

As your committee reviews H170 in light of questions regarding Vermont's teen drug use prevention and education efforts, I wish to bring your attention to the following facts:

1) Fears that reducing criminal penalties on the use of marijuana by adults will lead to an explosion in marijuana use by teenagers have proven unfounded in practice. This is not due to a lack of data; in fact, there is a plethora of data, from multiple federal studies, and these data all tell the same story: teen marijuana use has **not** increased in **any** jurisdiction that has legalized marijuana for adult use.

2) The last two decades have been a period of widespread liberalization of drug laws, with decriminalization, medical marijuana, and full legalization spreading nationwide. Over that period of time, according to the federal database that "rolls up" the 50 state-level Youth Risk Behavior Surveys,¹ the percentage of teens who feel that marijuana use is socially unacceptable is down by 30%. But actual teen marijuana use rates have slightly *decreased* during that period of time.

3) Vermont's teen marijuana use rates are nearly identical to the New England average, which is only slightly higher than the national average. When it comes to marijuana use by teenagers, Vermont is not particularly different than any other state.

4) Barbara Cimaglio, Vermont's Deputy Commissioner of Health, testified this past month to the House Judiciary Committee that teen marijuana use in Vermont has slightly *declined* in the two years since Vermont's "decriminalization" law went into effect.

¹ Johnston, L.D., et al., University of Michigan, *Monitoring the Future: a Continuing Study of American Youth* (monitoringthefuture.org)

4) Rates of teen marijuana *abuse* have decreased by 24% nationwide since 2002, even as more and more states legalized and decriminalized adult use, a phenomenon researchers attribute to an increased focus on early-intervention social services aimed at treating the underlying behavioral and psychological problems that, if left untreated, often lead children and teens to drug initiation as a form of self-medication.²

5) The Colorado Department of Public Health found in 2016 that teens whose parents have expressed their personal disapproval of marijuana use are *4 times less likely* to use marijuana than those whose parents have not done so, and teens that view their teachers as a source of support and encouragement are *1.7 times less likely* to use marijuana.³

As a parent of two school-aged children, I strongly support *evidenced-based* youth drug education and prevention programs. But we cannot ignore the plain fact that these efforts are needed *regardless of whether or not the Legislature legalizes marijuana for adult use*, nor can we ignore the plain fact that teen marijuana use does not correlate to its legal status or teen's perception of society's approval or disapproval of marijuana use. If we are to seriously address the problems of teen drug use and abuse, we must focus on the facts, rather than our fears.

Very truly yours,

Dave Silberman

² See, e.g., Grucza RA, et al., *Declining prevalence of marijuana use disorders among adolescents in the United States, 2002 to 2013*. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, vol. 55 (6). June 2016.

³ *Healthy Kids Colorado Survey*, www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/hkcs