



219 North Main Street | Suite 402 | Barre, VT 05641
(P) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835 | education.vermont.gov

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: House Human Services Committee
FROM: Robert Uerz, Agency of Education
TOPIC: H.170 DATE: April 4, 2017

Vermont Agency of Education position on H.170: An Act relating to possession and cultivation of marijuana by persons 21 years of age or older

The Vermont Agency of Education is cautiously tracking H.170.

In AOE's role to support Vermont children as they strive to be successful students on their path to career and college readiness, we believe that legalization of marijuana sends a tacit message that marijuana is a safe product and potentially undoes years of significant success achieved in our schools to discourage the recreation use of marijuana.

After reducing a two-decade high water mark of a statewide average of 35% of high school students using marijuana in the past 30 days in 1997 to 24% in 2013, and seeing our first 2% decline to 22% of high school students (again, statewide) in 2015 ([Past 30 Day Marijuana Use: 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), VDH). This decline in use is good news, however it comes with a sobering footnote: Of those 22% currently using, 33% of them use on a daily basis (20+ days per month). AOE is concerned use rates could rise again as a result of marijuana legalization.

AOE is concerned that legalization will further signal normalization of marijuana use for our children. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has found that reducing the "perception of risk of harm and potential consequences" plays a significant role in increasing use rates

AOE is especially concerned about the implications of marijuana use on adolescent brain development, which the medical research community agrees continues into the mid-twenties.

According to the [Vermont Department of Health's Health Impact Assessment on the Legalization of Marijuana](#) (released in January 2016), marijuana use has implications for academic performance.

Available research documents a dose-response relationship in terms of impact on academic outcomes, which basically means the more a student uses, the worse the outcome [page 46]. Furthermore, early and continuous use of marijuana is associated with a higher risk of not completing high school, not entering or completing college, having low educational achievement, earning a lower income, unemployment and being dependent on welfare as an adult [page 38].

The Health Department's Health Impact Assessment also indicates a number of associated health related concerns for children and young adults related to marijuana use:

1. Related to Physical Health: Marijuana impacts the physical structure of the brain
2. Related to Mental Health: Research over several years (prospective longitudinal studies) has shown that marijuana has negative mental health outcomes which include:

- Decrease in cognitive function and increase in memory loss
- Increased risk of becoming addicted to marijuana and other illicit drugs
- Increased risk of serious mental health problems [page 72]

Mindful of these concerns,

- AOE urges a delay in legalization in order to continue to strengthen existing prevention tools in our schools and to allow Supervisory Unions and Supervisory Districts to modify teacher contracts to comply with the legalization of the recreational use of marijuana.
- AOE urges a delay in legalization to adequately fund all schools to establish a more robust comprehensive health education effort; which could include hiring additional health educators at the local level, hiring additional mental health services & counselors and providing resources to coordinate statewide prevention efforts, since currently there are variations in youth marijuana use rates from 7% to 34% across the state ([Past 30 Day Marijuana Use 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), VDH).
- AOE urges a delay until a mechanism is in place to provide adequate funding for marijuana and other drug prevention in Vermont schools in perpetuity; not modeled after the Tobacco Settlement Litigation Fund so as not to allow re-direction of these funds in future years.