

I want to start off by saying we are very thankful for this opportunity to share our thoughts. My name is Christel Tonoki, I am a junior at Champlain Valley Union High school. I am here with my friend, Akuch Dau, who is a senior, also from CVU. We came to speak on behalf of our peers. CVU, if you ask other students, is not only said to be a school full of rich, preppy kids, but a school with a serious drug problem. CVU has had numerous car searches due to students possessing drugs. Students have been suspended because they were caught dealing marijuana to sophomores and freshmen. This serious drug problem, is it a CVU problem or is it a community one?

According to the Vermont Department of Health, “National data shows that more Vermonters (ages 12 and up) are using marijuana compared to the country overall. The number of Vermonters who try marijuana for the first time between the ages of 12 and 17 is also higher in our state than in the country overall.” Today's high-potency weed has 90%+ THC. “Clinical studies reveal that long-term, moderate consumption of the drug impairs short-term memory, slows reaction time, increases the risk of heart attack, and can result in birth defects, strokes, and damage to the respiratory system and brain”. Furthermore, the National Research Council has concluded that the “long-term use of marijuana may alter the nervous system in ways that do promote violence.” No place serves as a better example than Amsterdam though often touted as a well-functioning city with a relaxed attitude toward drugs, Amsterdam is also one of the most violent cities in Europe.

The future rests on the shoulders of this generation, let's ask ourselves is this really going to benefit the minds of our budding leaders? Are these risks worth the financial benefits of a few individuals? Is the money worth putting our future at stake? These are

not just my questions but the questions of the students I go to school with. Believe me, when I say that this bill is not in our favor and we gravely fear the repercussions we will have to endure if the reality of our concerns are disregarded.

I am a minor and I am concerned for my future. I'm also in fear because of the skin I was born in. It has been said that marijuana commercialization will help promote social justice. I disagree. Here are some key takeaways from smart approach to majuana.org

- Legalization has been heralded as a way to reduce the number of people of color incarcerated yet despite reductions in the arrests for marijuana possession in states that have legalized, the prison population has remained stable.
- *Residents in lower-income communities of color already have the blight a liquor store on every corner. The reality of legalization and commercialization is that these same communities will now be burdened with an oversaturation of pot shops on every other corner as well.*

Also, where there are issues of systemic injustice and racism, legalization does not address the root of these issues and instead only exacerbates these problems by promoting increased drug use and the accompanying negative social consequences in disadvantaged communities.

So, I ask, Instead of creating an industry, let's create opportunities. Instead of creating an industry-- lets create a stronger community that is safe, healthy and drug-free.

Thank you.