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To the Honorable members of the House Committee on the Judiciary,

As you consider Senate Bill S. 54, which establishes regulations for retail cannabis sales, I would like to draw your attention to a few concerns I have with the proposed legislation.

Recreational marijuana sales have long been an issue of concern in Newport. As the city's Police Chief, I can attest to the tremendous time and resources town officials and residents spent implementing an ordinance this past June banning the sale and distribution of marijuana in expectation of the legislature passing a bill allowing so.

The creation of the ordinance was a choice that, under Vermont state law and the state's long tradition as a non-referendum state, was entirely within the city's rights and purview to put in place.

The "retail cannabis sales" bill before your committee jeopardizes the rights of cities and towns to make these decisions, however, and as it stands would require municipalities to hold an annual or special meeting and hold a vote in order to prohibit the operation of retail cannabis establishments. It essentially forces recreational marijuana as a "default yes" on cities and towns.

This bill threatens the authority our state has long afforded its municipalities in governing our communities at the local level. Forcing the hands of our communities to host retail marijuana establishments is not only unjust, it contradicts decades of legislative tradition in our state.

Although recreational marijuana use has been legalized in Vermont, and the Legislature is now contemplating the legalization of retail cannabis sales, marijuana remains illegal under federal law.

Many municipalities rely on federal funding and have no desire to jeopardize the programs, capital projects, and initiatives that those monies support in order to house recreational marijuana establishments. Many cities and towns in Vermont simply do not wish to break federal law.

Of major concern to police and to transportation safety advocates, there is still no universally or generally accepted standard for determining whether an individual is under the influence of marijuana during a traffic stop. This is an issue other states that have legalized recreational marijuana continue to grapple with. Unlike the breathalyzer tests and procedures we have to determine whether an individual has been driving under the influence of alcohol, we do not have such a test for marijuana use.

The possible increase of impaired drivers recreational marijuana could spark is also a threat to public safety. According to the Vermont Highway Safety Alliance's 2018 Annual Report, the average number of major motor vehicle crashes involving drivers under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol has decreased in Vermont by 24 percent since 2009. We've made significant progress in reducing the threat of impaired driving statewide, and it greatly concerns me that we're taking steps to make recreational marijuana exponentially more accessible without a test or process in place to reliably determine whether an individual is under the influence of marijuana – and thus no solid way to enforce the law and protect motorists and pedestrians from high drivers.

As you contemplate this bill, please consider the concerns I present to you in this letter. The safety of Newport, and of Vermont, is of the utmost importance to me and my department. Recreational marijuana is an issue that has been widely oversimplified by popular culture, and as Vermont shapes the laws surrounding this drug that will have ramifications on the public health and safety of our state, and in every community, I urge you to protect the authority of our cities and towns have to make decisions for themselves in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "S. Solis", written in a cursive style.