



Monday, February 15, 2021

Representative Zack Stephenson
509 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Stephenson,

We would like to respond to the DFL's proposal to legalize the commercial sale of cannabis (we use cannabis to mean the THC potent form of marijuana). We at SAMMn oppose the commercialization of THC for many reasons. But before we get into the reasons why this is not a good idea; we would like to propose one area where we might find common ground.

We understand the impact the current laws in Minnesota have had on communities of color. While Minnesota changed the law in 1976 so that possession of up 1.5 ounces is a petty misdemeanor, this has still led to a huge disparity in arrests. Therefore, we support legislation moderating criminal penalties to instead create civil penalties such as a sliding scale of citations for possession of a small amount of cannabis. Also, we support a way to create a method for expungement for those convicted of or with a record of a petty misdemeanor cannabis possession offence.

We side with the Senate Republicans and the Biden administration that science should dictate whether THC is made commercially available. Here are some areas of real concern with the research citations:

1. Cannabis is NOT a safe drug.

THC the part of the plant that gets you high is addictive (between 9% to 30% may develop a cannabis use disorder), the THC potency these days is much stronger than in the past.ⁱ And THC contributes to many medical health problems (e.g., mental illness, learning and memory impairment and impaired driving)ⁱⁱ.

2. Driving while impaired is a growing problem.

Cannabis impairment can last 2 – 3 hours. The State of Washington and Oregon have reported striking trend data that show a sharp increase in the percent of fatal accidents with a cannabis-positive driver. For example, in the State of Washington: prior to commercialization, the percent of THC-positive fatal car crashes averaged about 9%; 5 years after commercialization, that figure was 21%. And driving arrests in Colorado last year increased 48%.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. The state will not benefit from sizeable tax revenues.

Commercialization backers rarely discuss the costs associated with widespread use of the drug on health care, mental health services, law enforcement, businesses and consumers.^{iv} A study showed that in Colorado the estimated health and social costs per dollar of tax revenue was \$4.57.^v

4. Adolescent use will likely increase because the minimum legal age will be 21.

The US Surgeon General just stated "No amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is known to be safe."^{vi} Mark Mishek of Hazelden, he wrote in the StarTribune "in 2018, almost 90% of those ages 12 to 26 in our national program for young people identified marijuana use in the constellation of problems that led them to seek help."^{vii}



A study published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry found that rates of marijuana addiction among teens (12-17) in states that have “legalized” marijuana were 25 percent higher and, past-month frequent use and past-year problematic use increased by 23 percent.^{viii}

In a study just released in January by the University of Cambridge showed IQ declines following frequent or dependent marijuana use in teens.^{ix}

5. Commercializing cannabis has not resolved social injustice issues.

In an ACLU report issued in April 2020 found little change in arrests of minorities in states that had legalized marijuana. In some states it had gone down while in others it had gone up.^x

Denver: cannabis stores are clustered in minority neighborhoods, similar to liquor stores in low-income areas.^{xi}

A very small percent of Minnesotans are incarcerated for cannabis use, (50 of over 10,000 inmates).^{xii}

6. The black market will not be eliminated.

The opposite is occurring in legalization states. The black market is expanding as they undercut the retail price. In 2018 CA grew 15 million pounds of pot but only sold 2.5 million.^{xiii}

7. Cannabis is not commonly used.

Most Minnesotans older than 25 do not use cannabis (~11% report prior year use); the majority of users are in the 18-25-year-old range (~37% report prior year use).

Again, we believe that science and the experience of other states should be the guide. So far that doesn't look as promising as the marijuana industry

Sincerely

Judson (Kim) Bemis
Chair, Smart Approaches to Marijuana Minnesota



ⁱ www.nationalacademies.org/cannabishealtheffects

ⁱⁱ Volkow, N. D., Swanson, J. M., Evins, A. E., DeLisi, L. E., Meier, M. H., Gonzalez, R., ... & Baler, R. (2016). Effects of cannabis use on human behavior, including cognition, motivation, and psychosis: A review. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 73(3), 292-297.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://denver.cbslocal.com/2021/01/29/marijuana-dui-colorado-arrests-alcohol/>

^{iv} <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6258013/>

^v <https://learnaboutsam.org>

^{vi} <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>

^{vii} <https://www.startribune.com/vaping-conversation-needs-to-get-real-on-marijuana/564527242/>

^{viii} . *JAMA Psychiatry*, 77(2), 165. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.3254>

^{ix} <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/psychological-medicine/article/intelligence-quotient-decline-following-frequent-or-dependent-cannabis-use-in-youth-a-systematic-review-and-metaanalysis-of-longitudinal-studies/26BEC9CBD2A39010C26100278F8CA813>

^x <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-rationally-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>

^{xi} <https://learnaboutsam.org>

^{xii} MN Department of Corrections Fact Sheet 2019

^{xiii} <https://learnaboutsam.org> Lessons Learned Black Market