Testimony of Ken Winters, PhD. regarding the House cannabis legalization bill, HF100

March 1, 2023

Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony regarding cannabis bill HF100.

I am Ken Winters, PhD., a long-standing researcher in drug abuse, with 20 years as a professor in psychiatry at the University of Minnesota. I co-founded Smart Approaches to Marijuana Minnesota, which is the state affiliate of the national group, Smart Approaches to Marijuana. I am very knowledge about the research and science of cannabis use.

I appreciate the work of the bill's authors. The complexity of commercializing cannabis requires thoughtful debate on many levels related to health, law and public safety.

There are two features of the bill related to lawful and unlawful cannabis use I see as entry points for amendments.

One is the issue of the legal minimum age. Several scientific justifications exist to raise the minimum legal age to 25. The science is now very strong that THC is very damaging to the developing brain. And research also indicates that cannabis is significantly more damaging to the developing brain than alcohol and nicotine. Also, use of cannabis before age 25 greatly increases the likelihood of developing a cannabis use disorder and a serious mental disorder, and of impairing a young person's ability to learn.

My second point is to urge the committee to ensure that HF100 adequately addresses underage use and related violations. It is important to define what constitutes non-medical cannabis violations for underage youth (e.g., use in public; possession; selling or providing THC products to others), and to establish and enforce a system of consequences. For example, an offense could be subjected to a graduated fine system that escalates to a health-related service, such as a substance use assessment, if the youth has received more than two priors. This idea is akin to Oregon's Measure 110.

Thank you for your attention to my written testimony.

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