

Testimony of Ken Winters, PhD. regarding the cannabis legalization bill, HF 100

February 17, 2023

Members of the House Health Policy and Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in opposition to cannabis bill HF 100.

I am Ken Winters, PhD., a long-standing research in drug abuse, with 20 years of it while 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 knowledgeable about the research and science of cannabis use.

There are now over 20,000 scientific articles in the published literature that consistently point to one major conclusion: Using cannabis greatly increases the risk to the user of numerous health and safety problems. Major reviews from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Academy of Sciences detail numerous harms from cannabis use, including elevating risks of mental illness, poor cognitive functioning, disruptions in brain development, and impaired driving. Studies in states that have passed cannabis legislation have consistently reached the conclusion that commercializing cannabis contributes to an increase in negative health effects on its citizens. As an international panel of experts wrote in 2021 (Fischer et al., 2021, *International Drug Policy*), “there is no universally safe level of cannabis use; thus, the only reliable way to avoid any risk for harm from using cannabis is to abstain from its use.”

Once a drug is legalized and thus normalized, it’s increased popularity will lead to a rise in the percentage of citizens who use cannabis, including underage youth. This has been consistently shown in states that have already legalized cannabis. And it’s a false promise that regulating the cannabis business will lead to a healthier and safer state. Unregulated products will continue and even flourish.

If there are concerns that our state over-criminalizes cannabis users, then decriminalize it and expunge the records of those convicted of a minor possession. Yet the commercialization portion of the bill in its current form, which is absent of many necessary rigorous guardrails, is not a good idea for Minnesota.

A summary of the safety and health issues is provided on pp. 2 and 3 of my letter.

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**Based on Lessons Learned from Other States and Published Scientific Research,
What Are the Likely Effects of Commercializing Cannabis?**

Users of cannabis, particularly users of high potency THC, will increase their likelihood of

Developing a cannabis use disorder ¹⁻⁸

Progression to use other drugs ⁹

Suffering from severe and persistent mental disorder ^{1, 2, 10-14}

Damaging brain development during adolescence ^{1, 2, 14-18}

Deficits in learning, memory and IQ ^{2, 9, 16-21}

Poorer functional well-being, including derailment by youth of transition to adulthood ^{9, 13, 19, 21-22}

State-wide, we will likely see...

Higher prevalence rates of cannabis use by youth and adults ⁴⁻⁸

Greater strain on mental health and related social services ^{1, 2, 10-14}

Greater proportion of motor vehicle accidents linked to cannabis intoxication ²³⁻²⁶

Increase in emergency room visits because of acute overdose reactions ^{26-27, 30}

Less safe workplace ²⁶

State-wide, we will likely NOT see...

Lower opioid abuse rates ^{26, 28-29}

Enough tax revenue to cover attendant social and health costs ²⁶

Reduction in crime ²⁶

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