

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

March 12, 2023

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

I am Ken Winters, PhD., a long-time drug abuse researcher, 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 knowledgeable 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 and the economy.

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 disruptions in cognitive functioning and impaired driving.

Fatal traffic accidents involving drivers with cannabis in their system as measured with a blood test have spiked significantly in states post-legalization. There is no valid road-side test and no standard exists for cannabis intoxication. Without a functional test and in the absence of a defined standard for THC-impairment, regulators and law enforcement cannot effectively determine the culpability of individuals who are under the influence of cannabis while driving.

Passage of HF100 will increase the percentage of Minnesotans who use cannabis, including underage youth. Increased prevalence of cannabis use will contribute to less safe highways.

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. If the medical marijuana program is not affordable or accessible, then fix that program.

Thank you for your attention to my written testimony.

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