March 8, 2023

Dear Chair Melissa Wiklund, Chair Tina Liebling, and members of the committee,

I am writing to express my support for bill HF 1884 by Representative Smith, which aims to establish a task force to investigate the potential of psychedelic medicines.

As a licensed psychologist who has worked in the mental health field in Minnesota for the past 50 years, I fully endorse this bill. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was significant and very encouraging research around psychedelics, before they were outlawed during a period of cultural upheaval. It is now well understood, in historical context, that President Nixon’s War on Drugs was an effort to create an easy avenue for arresting “hippies” and Black people. The incarceration of large numbers of individuals who were seen as threatening the “law and order” of the establishment was a remarkably effective tool in suppressing freedom of thought and action in our country.

Just as the culture wars of the 60’s and 70’s seemed to be tearing our country apart, we are once again reliving the present-day culture wars. This context is important because it helps us understand that psychedelics were not criminalized based on science, pharmacology, or research. Rather, they were criminalized for cultural reasons.

We are struggling to find effective relief for individuals with treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, drug addiction, end-of-life issues, and numerous other mental health challenges. There is never a panacea, a treatment that works for everyone all the time. The same will be true of psychedelics. However, denying meaningful research with drugs, which showed so much promise when they were legal, only exacerbates the ugly mental health crisis that we see in our country today. If we desire to support our most troubled patients, we must be open to exploring new methods that are now showing promise in other states and countries.

As a licensed psychologist who earned a PhD from the University of Minnesota, I urge you to support this effort to further understand the potential of psychedelic therapies in our state. There is already strong research evidence that these substances can be used in safe and therapeutic contexts to provide treatment that is not available with our existing modalities. I urge you to allow the continued scientific exploration of these new approaches to healing. It is imperative that we move beyond today’s limited and often ineffective practices.

Thank you,

R. Edward Bergmark, PhD, LP