



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 1371, WHICH WOULD LEGALIZE MARIJUANA

Joint Judiciary Committee

March 6, 2012

Massachusetts Family Institute strongly opposes HB 1371. Legalization of marijuana will come at the expense of our children and public safety. It will create dependency and treatment issues, and open the door to use of other drugs, impaired health, delinquent behavior, and drugged drivers. This is not the marijuana of the 1970s; today's marijuana is far more powerful. Marijuana takes the risks of tobacco and raises them. Marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals and increases the risk of serious health consequences, including lung damage.

Roughly 60 percent of first-time marijuana users are under 18 years old. During adolescence and into young adulthood, the brain continues to develop and may be vulnerable to marijuana's deleterious effects. Science has shown that marijuana can produce adverse physical and mental health impairments.

- According to a recent report by the Office of National Drug Control Policy:

- Depressed teens are twice as likely as non-depressed teens to use marijuana and other illicit drugs.
- Depressed teens are more than twice as likely as their peers to abuse or become dependent on marijuana.
- Marijuana use can worsen depression and lead to mental illness such as schizophrenia, anxiety, and even suicide.
- Teens who smoke marijuana once a month are three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts than non-users.

The basic rule with any drug is if the drug becomes more available in the society, there will be more use of the drug. Among all ages, marijuana was the second most common illicit drug responsible for treatment admissions in 2008 after opioids, accounting for 17 percent of all admissions--outdistancing cocaine, the next most prevalent cause. Teens who experiment with marijuana are 13 times likelier than other teens to use another drug like cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamine and almost 26 times likelier than teens that have never used marijuana to use another drug. Adults who were early marijuana users were found to be five times more likely to become dependent on any drug, eight times more likely to use cocaine in the future, and fifteen times more likely to use heroin later in life.

Marijuana use is strongly associated with juvenile crime, and known to contribute to delinquent and aggressive behavior. Youth who use marijuana are likelier than those who do not to be arrested and arrested repeatedly. The earlier an individual begins to use marijuana, the likelier he or she is to be arrested. Early use of marijuana is a warning sign for later criminal behavior such as physically attacking people, stealing property, and destroying property, crimes that increase in direct proportion to the frequency with which teens smoke marijuana.

Children often bear the consequences of actions engaged in by parents or guardians involved with marijuana. Let's not leave that legacy for our children.

Sincerely,

Maureen Vacca
Public Policy Director