

Testimony of Ken Winters, PhD. regarding the cannabis legalization bill, SF73

March 12, 2023

Members of the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit a written testimony in opposition to cannabis bill SF73.

I am Ken Winters, PhD., a long-time 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 knowledgeable about the research and science of cannabis use.

There are now over 20,000 peer reviewed science articles that consistently point to one major conclusion: Using cannabis greatly increases the risk to the user of numerous health and safety problems. 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."

Studies of states that have commercialized cannabis have consistently reached the conclusion that commercializing cannabis contributes to an increase in negative health effects on its citizens. Of note is the damage it does to the adolescent developing brain, to a user's mental health, learning ability, and driving ability

Once a drug is legalized and thus normalized, its increased popularity will lead to a rise in the percentage of citizens who use cannabis. This has been consistently shown in states that have already legalized cannabis.

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 bill is to be passed, then place a THC potency cap at 15%, increase the minimum legal age to 25, require a warning label on all products that use cannabis can contribute to mental health problems and is ill-advised to those under age 25.

Also, the bill needs to be adjusted to allow local communities to opt out of permitting retail sales. Other legalized states have seen that the black market seeks communities where there is a population base and favorable demographics, regardless if the community has opted in or out. It is a fair and just position to grant communities the option to disallow retail sales.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony.

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