

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

February 28, 2023

Members of the Senate Human Services 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 and to a user's mental health.

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, and allow communities to opt out.

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

I urge the committee to oppose SF73.

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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 <sup>1-8</sup>

Progression to use other drugs <sup>9</sup>

Suffering from severe and persistent mental disorder <sup>1, 2, 10-14</sup>

Damaging brain development during adolescence <sup>1, 2, 14-18</sup>

Deficits in learning, memory and IQ <sup>2, 9, 16-21</sup>

Poorer functional well-being, including derailment by youth of transition to adulthood <sup>9, 13, 19, 21-22</sup>

**State-wide, we will likely see...**

Higher prevalence rates of cannabis use by youth and adults <sup>4-8</sup>

Greater strain on mental health and related social services <sup>1, 2, 10-14</sup>

Greater proportion of motor vehicle accidents linked to cannabis intoxication <sup>23-26</sup>

Increase in emergency room visits because of acute overdose reactions <sup>26-27, 30</sup>

Less safe workplace <sup>26</sup>

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

Lower opioid abuse rates <sup>26, 28-29</sup>

Enough tax revenue to cover attendant social and health costs <sup>26</sup>

Reduction in crime <sup>26</sup>

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