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Connecticut State Medical Society Testimony in opposition to
Senate Bill 1085 AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION OF THE RETAIL SALE
AND POSSESSION OF CANNABIS AND
CONCERNING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS IN THE CASE OF CONVICTIONS
BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF CANNABIS

Judiciary Committee
March 22, 2019

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of the Judiciary Committee, on behalf of the physicians and physicians in training of the Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS), please accept this testimony in opposition to **Senate Bill 1085 AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION OF THE RETAIL SALE AND POSSESSION OF CANNABIS AND CONCERNING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS IN THE CASE OF CONVICTIONS BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF CANNABIS.**

The CSMS commends the CT legislature for its very thorough attempt to write legislation designed to regulate and properly control the sale of marijuana or cannabis in a socially responsible manner. As the professional organization most invested in public health and safety the physicians and physicians in training of the CSMS feel a deep obligation to provide cautionary testimony regarding this effort. Although other states have passed similar legislation there is no evidence to date that such statutory change has positively influenced the public health of the community whereas there is emerging evidence to suggest the opposite. Although the CT Marijuana Advisory Board has substantially increased the number of conditions for which certificates may be issued, virtually all of these conditions have received support for their inclusion based solely on anecdotal reports and not on scientifically controlled trials. There is, on the other hand, strong evidence to support the belief that marijuana carries substantial health risks for vulnerable populations including adolescents and those with substance abuse potential. These risks include acute psychosis, long-term cognitive deficits, and addiction.

Studies from Colorado show an increased incidence of pharmacologically active cannabis compounds in the blood of individuals who have succumbed to death in motor vehicle accidents suggesting that marijuana intoxication and its effects on cognitive function may play a role in MVA's and by extension may also increase accidents in the workplace. Current policy allows employers to test employees in high-risk occupations for substance abuse. Legalization of marijuana may make this more difficult since marijuana byproducts linger in the blood long after dosing, making accurate blood testing difficult or impossible. The same problem occurs with testing drivers for intoxication since blood testing for marijuana is not a reliable indicator of intoxication and hampered ability to operate a motor vehicle.

Recent studies show that nicotine delivery systems using vaping devices have resulted in substantially increased rates of use by adolescents and even evidence to suggest that such use results in higher initiation into other nicotine sources including actual tobacco products, potentially reversing the huge gains in public health that have been achieved by smoking cessation efforts.

Although Senate Bill 1085 makes an effort to control diversion, we have learned from our experience with tobacco and alcohol products that no amount of control or good intent will prevent this from occurring. Every state is struggling with an opioid epidemic that continues almost unabated despite the best efforts of physicians to curtail prescriptions for legitimate opioids. A large part of the problem is due to a substantial and pernicious illicit drug infrastructure that has grown exponentially with the increased use of prescription opioids for pain control. Permitting marijuana for recreational use will only make the illicit drug infrastructure larger and even more difficult to control.

Recreational marijuana is largely consumed in the form of inhaled smoke. Although studies are sparse and inconclusive to date, there is every reason to expect that as with tobacco, the combustion products of inhaled marijuana will cause significant lung disease with its attendant morbidity and mortality in those who are regular users.

The state has taken a major step forward by decriminalizing the possession of small quantities of cannabis products, and while the societal benefits are real and may be further extended by full legalization, those benefits must be weighed against the very real negative health effects. We urge the state to take a slower approach and specifically a wait and see approach to allow us to learn from the mistakes of others before we have to face the challenging position of repealing a law that was well intended, but too far ahead of its time. Until that time we must oppose the legalization of Marijuana