

03/03/2020

Representative Mohamud Noor, Chair
Workforce and Business Development Finance and Policy
379 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 600 (Winkler), Cannabis Legalization

Dear Chair Noor and committee members,

We write to express our support for HF 600 to legalize adult use cannabis in MN. Minneapolis Students for Sensible Drug Policy is the local ambassador chapter of the global organization, Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP). SSDP was founded in 1998 and is the largest global youth-led network dedicated to ending the War on Drugs. HF 600 is the result of countless hours of community collaboration through organizing with stakeholders and holding state-wide “Be Heard on Cannabis” meetings. This bill establishes regulation that carefully considers issues around youth access, public health, as well as road safety. It is an essential move to address racial disparities in our criminal justice system caused by the War on Drugs. Our organization also has members that are medical cannabis patients, chronic pain/illness patients unable to afford the current program, and veterans--all of whom HF 600 was written to greatly benefit with increased access to life saving medicine.

HF 600 carefully addresses many concerns that were brought forward about youth access. This includes detailed packaging regulations, including requiring “plain, child-resistant, tamper-evident, and opaque” containers, while banning other packaging and advertising that would appeal to children. We approve of the plan set out in Article 7, Section 5 for cannabis education programs. SSDP has developed an evidence-based drug education program called “Just Say Know”. We also often collaborate with the Drug Policy Alliance, who developed the country’s first harm reduction-, evidence-based drug education program for high schools called: “Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens”. It is essential to provide both youth and adults with information on the risks of cannabis use and provide education on how to reduce those risks. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2019 study showed that rates of use for cannabis had actually decreased in states that had legalized cannabis.¹

Our chapter formed from a group of students at Minneapolis College completing their degrees to become licensed alcohol and drug counselors (LADCs) out of our passion for advocating for sensible drug policies and evidence-based practices. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), rates of developing a cannabis use disorder are estimated based on prevalence data to impact only about 30% of people who use cannabis and these rates decrease with age.² HF 600 has set the legal age for adult-use cannabis to 21 years and develops a Substance Use Advisory Council that will create and enact approaches for both education and treatment. In addition, the most recent data collected by the Drug and Alcohol Abuse Normative Evaluation System (DAANES) show that 30% of all treatment referrals are from the criminal justice system.³ The American Civil Liberties Union

¹ Ta M, Bolt K, & Greto L. (2019). *Trends and characteristics in marijuana use among public school students - King County*. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019;68:845–850. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6839a3>

² Hasin DS, Saha TD, Kerridge BT, et al. *Prevalence of Marijuana Use Disorders in the United States Between 2001-2002 and 2012-2013*. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2015;72(12):1235-1242. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.1858

³ DAANES. *Percent of Referrals to Treatment by the Criminal Justice System*. <http://www.sumn.org/data/topic/show.aspx?loc=88&ind=703>.

(ACLU) has shown that Black Minnesotans are 5.4 times more likely than white Minnesotans to be arrested for cannabis possession and that Minnesota ranks 8th for having the worst racial disparities.⁴ They also detailed that in 2018, 35% of all drug arrests were for cannabis possession.

We do not believe that just decriminalization of cannabis is sufficient to address these racial justice issues nor public health issues. When Minneapolis decriminalized cannabis in 2017, 46 out of 47 arrested for cannabis possession were Black residents.⁵ This resulted in Mayor Jacob Frey having to order a stop to low-level stings. Outside of continued racial profiling and discrimination, public health issues still remain in a society with decriminalized cannabis. The rash of vaping related lung disease was confirmed by the CDC to be related to black market, unregulated cannabis products.⁶ A regulated market with adequate testing must be implemented from a public health standpoint to reduce the risk of harmful diseases caused by unregulated products, because Minnesotans do have access to the black market, and it can be detrimental to their health. This can be paired with harm reduction-, evidence-based education, so that adults can be informed on how cannabis use and different cannabis products could impact their health. HF 600 addresses both of these concerns with thorough guidelines for a regulatory market and education.

The official SSDP Global position on cannabis policy reform stands as:

SSDP neither condones nor condemns drug use, rather we respect the right of individuals to make decisions about their own health and well-being. We encourage honest conversation about the realities of the drug war. SSDP recognizes that policies supporting the prohibition of cannabis were created with intentions of criminalizing cannabis users and targeting communities of color for incarceration. Today, prohibitionist policies disproportionately affect generations of communities of color and serve as a reminder of the racialized political history of the U.S. SSDP recognizes it is imperative to replace destructive prohibitionist policies with common-sense regulatory policies.

Prohibition was never based in science nor evidence. It has caused the same dangers as alcohol prohibition that have grown to fuel mass incarceration and has severely harmed individuals and communities for the past 80 years. So, we urge you to please support this critical piece of legislation that is a racial justice, disability justice, economic justice, criminal justice reform, and public health issue.

Sincerely,

Rory O'Brien



Chapter Leader, Minneapolis Students for Sensible Drug Policy

⁴ American Civil Liberties Union. (2020). *A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform*. American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/a-tale-of-two-countries-rationally-targeted-arrests-in-the-era-of-marijuana-reform/>.

⁵ Jany L, & Furst R. (2018, June 8). Minneapolis cops halt low-level marijuana stings after racial disparity revealed. *Star Tribune*.

⁶ Ellington S, Salvatore PP, Ko J, et al. *Update: Product, Substance-Use, and Demographic Characteristics of Hospitalized Patients in a Nationwide Outbreak of E-cigarette, or Vaping, Product Use-Associated Lung Injury* — United States, August 2019–January 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:44–49. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6902e2>