



April 14, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Minnesota House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee
Hon. Jamie Becker-Finn, Chair
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Minnesota Catholic Conference opposition to HF600 and Request for Standalone Decriminalization Bill

Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, writes to express our opposition to HF600, a measure which would create the regulatory framework for a commercial marijuana industry in Minnesota while also being touted as a remedy to disparate enforcement of existing marijuana prohibitions.

Pope Francis has given us great guidance on this issue. In 2014, in an address to the International Drug Enforcement Conference he reminded us that “attempts, however limited, to legalize so-called recreational drugs, are not only highly questionable from a legislative standpoint, but they fail to produce desired effects.” He also stated that, “it is necessary to confront the problems underlying the use of these drugs, by promoting greater justice, educating young people in the values that build up life in society, accompanying those in difficulty, and giving them hope for the future.”

The Minnesota Catholic Conference stands in solidarity with those seeking equal treatment, community rehabilitation, and family restoration. At the same time, we believe it wholly inappropriate to suggest that only through marijuana legalization will social justice be achieved, or criminal justice inequity remedied.

475 University Avenue W.
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103

Tel: 651-227-8777
Fax: 651-227-2675
www.mncatholic.org

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS ♦ DIOCESE OF CROOKSTON ♦ DIOCESE OF DULUTH

DIOCESE OF NEW ULM ♦ DIOCESE OF SAINT CLOUD ♦ DIOCESE OF WINONA-ROCHESTER

While it is important to evaluate the impact of incarceration within communities of color, it is equally important to take notice of what we are seeing in other states regarding the impact of marijuana legalization on those same communities. In Oregon, the state conducted an analysis on the distribution of state-sanctioned dispensaries and found that sites were concentrated among low-income and historically disenfranchised communitiesⁱ. Though industry proponents suggest that marijuana legalization will alleviate injustices against socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, disparities criminal offense rates and industry participation have persisted in states that legalized marijuana. Nationally, fewer than 2% of all marijuana businesses are owned by minoritiesⁱⁱ and African Americans are twice as likely to be arrested for marijuana in Colorado and Washington, both states that have legalized recreational use and sales.ⁱⁱⁱ

Reconciliation for disparate marijuana enforcement should be discussed, but as a separate bill. One of the most troubling realities about HF 600 is that it could delay other potential reforms by tying expungements, decriminalization of petty possession, and additional resources for those seeking recovery to the approval of a predatory industry.

As members of the Judiciary Committee, you are uniquely situated to reject that false dichotomy and take action on standalone legislation that would give marijuana decriminalization the vehicle it deserves, regardless of whether the recreational marijuana industry is legalized and commercialized.

Respectfully submitted,



Ryan E. Hamilton, Esq.
Government Relations Associate

ⁱ Smith, P. (2017, August 19). Why are so many pot shops in poor neighborhoods? Salon. https://www.salon.com/2017/08/19/why-are-so-many-pot-shops-in-poor-neighborhoods_partner/

ⁱⁱ Schoenberg, S. (2018, December 5). Boston grapples with diversity in marijuana industry. MassLive. https://www.masslive.com/politics/2018/12/boston_grapples_with_lack_of_d.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ). (2016). Black People Twice As Likely To Be Arrested For Pot In Colorado And Washington — Where It's Legal. <http://www.cjcj.org/news/10232>