

February 19, 2020

Testimony regarding THE RETAIL SALE OF MARIJUANA

To the Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

The Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (CADH) is a nonprofit organization comprised of the Directors of Connecticut's local health departments and districts. Local health directors are the statutory agents of the Commissioner of Public Health and are critical providers of essential public health services at the local level in Connecticut.

While recognizing the potential financial benefits to the State from taxation revenue associated with this industry, the members of CADH oppose the retail sale of marijuana. As you are aware, Connecticut and the nation are struggling to make an impact in the opioid crisis. In 2018, over 1,000 of our residents lost their lives to overdoses and this number increased to over 1200 in 2019. This number does not reflect the untold thousands that overdosed and survived to live with the disease of addiction. Nor do those numbers reflect the thousands of people - members of families, churches, workplaces, and neighborhoods who are profoundly impacted in the ripple effect. Local health departments have aggressively worked on this issue by working with law enforcement officials, pre-hospital care partners, boards of education, prevention coalitions, elected officials, members of clergy, treatment facilities and countless other disciplines to try to turn the tide in the epidemic.

At this moment in time, when so many families are torn apart by the disease of substance misuse and emergency services are overwhelmed in responding to the current epidemic, CADH would like to emphasize the position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on this issue when they stated: "Researchers do not yet know the full extent of the consequences when the body and brain (especially the developing brain) are exposed to high concentrations of THC or how recent increases in potency affect the risk of someone becoming addicted." The CDC also raises concerns when it comes to the potential adverse health effects of marijuana use on heart health, cancer, lung health, poisonings and the developing brain which, according to research, occurs up to the age of about 25. In addition, acute poisonings associated with edibles, especially in children, have been documented in states where retail sales have been legalized

While there is debate about marijuana as a gateway drug, there is no debate that people of all ages, genders and socio-economic backgrounds are affected with the disease of addiction. Allowing the retail sale of marijuana may increase these addiction rates and amplify the current crisis. Our residents, communities and personnel are struggling to make an impact in the opioid crisis and adding retail sale of marijuana in our state will likely complicate those efforts. However, should the decision be made to approve the recreational sale of marijuana, adequate funding for educational programs and substance misuse treatment must be allocated from revenues generated from taxation.

Respectfully Submitted by the CADH Board of Directors