



## NEWS

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### **Illinois Governor and Legislature urged to fully consider and prepare for consequences before legalizing recreational marijuana**

#### **For Immediate Release**

**Chicago, IL – January 22, 2019** –Today, the Chicago Crime Commission along with representatives from Drug Free America Foundation, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, and a former member of the White House Drug Czar’s office and expert physician specializing in addiction medicine held a news conference to discuss the dangers of legalizing recreational marijuana. The news conference was held to urge Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois General Assembly to fully consider and prepare for the consequences before legalizing recreational marijuana in Illinois.

“Legalizing marijuana presents significant public safety and health concerns that need to be fully discussed and considered before Illinois moves forward in this endeavor,” said Jeffrey Johnson, a member of the board of directors for the Chicago Crime Commission.

“First, it is important that we must address the misconception that legalizing marijuana will somehow be a panacea in addressing the illegal marijuana trade and other crime in Illinois by examining the experience of other states that have legalized recreational marijuana,” Johnson said. “For example, in 2017 the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (RMHIDTA), a drug taskforce comprised of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, issued a report detailing the investigations of 163 individuals or organizations involved in illegally selling Colorado marijuana both in and out of state,” he continued.

“These cases led to 252 felony arrests; 7,116 (3.5 tons) pounds of marijuana seized; 47,108 marijuana plants seized; 2,111 marijuana edibles seized; and 232 pounds of concentrate seized. The marijuana confiscated in these black market operations was destined for 29 different states,” Johnson explained.

The RMHIDTA report also showed that highway interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased 43% in the four-year average (2013-2016) since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana compared to the four-year average (2009-2012) prior to legalization. Also, of the 346 highway interdiction seizures in 2016, there were 36 different states destined to receive marijuana from Colorado. RMHIDTA most current updated report supports these trends.

“The premise that legalizing marijuana will somehow lower crime in Illinois must also be challenged and examined,” Johnson continued. “For example, in the three years studied since Colorado has legalized marijuana, crime has increased 17% in Denver alone and 11% in Colorado as a whole,” he added.

The impact that legalizing recreational marijuana will have on traffic safety must also be addressed. “According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the proportion of drivers in the United States testing positive for marijuana increased from 8.6% in 2007 to 19.2% in 2017, an overall increase of 123%,” according to Dr. Sharif Mohr, epidemiologist for Drug Free America Foundation. “If this trend continues over the next decade, marijuana may overtake alcohol to become the most common substance involved in deaths related to impaired driving,” he said.

“Data from states with liberal marijuana laws have consistently shown significant increases in the number of marijuana-impaired drivers and marijuana-related traffic fatalities. Since recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado in 2012 the number of traffic fatalities in which the driver tested positive for THC has more than doubled. In 2011, the year before legalization, there were 58 traffic fatalities in which the driver was positive for THC; in 2017 there were 138, an overall increase of 138%,” Mohr said. “In addition, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) reported a 13% increase in accident claims from 2012-2017 in Colorado,” he added.

The state of Washington, which also legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, has fared no better. In addition to experiencing a 10% increase in accident claims during the 5 year period

after legalization, the percentage of daytime drivers testing positive for marijuana has more than doubled.

Based on their own conservative estimates, Drug Free America projects 53 motorists in Illinois will likely be killed and 3,652 likely will be injured if marijuana is legalized in 2020. “The total economic costs of those fatalities and injuries due to marijuana-impaired driving would exceed \$213 million,” Mohr added.

The fact that currently there is no reliable test that enables law enforcement officers to definitively determine if a driver was intoxicated by marijuana at the time of the traffic stop or accident is cause for concern. “Due to the long half-life of marijuana metabolites, a positive urine or blood test does not necessarily indicate that a person was intoxicated on marijuana at the time of screening, making enforcement difficult, according to Steve Stelter, First Vice-President of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and Chief of the Westchester Police Department. “Future research should include development of screening tools that will enable law enforcement to conclusively determine if a driver is impaired by marijuana at the time of screening,” he added.

Additionally, the IACP has received reports from police school resource officers throughout the state telling us that marijuana use within our schools continues to rise,’ Stelter said. We are very concerned that if marijuana is legalized for recreational use, this trend will not only continue but accelerate,” he continued.

“When it comes to the well-being of our children, the persistent narrative that marijuana is somehow benign or even safe makes the situation even more disturbing,” according to Dr. Andrea Barthwell, director and founder of Two Dreams Addiction Treatment Center and former Deputy Director of Demand Reduction in the White House Drug Czar’s Office.

“According to the RMHIDTA report, youth past month marijuana use increased 12% in the three-year average (2013-2015) since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana compared to the three-year average prior to legalization (2010-2012),” Barthwell said.

What’s even more troubling is the impact marijuana has on the developing brain. Data indicates that children and other young people are at the greatest risk. “Short term and prolonged marijuana use also impacts academic success by impairing learning, memory, abstract thinking

and problem solving. Additionally, more youth are entering addiction treatment centers for marijuana addiction than for any other substance,” Barthwell added. “Also, marijuana use by children can lead to long-term mental health consequences including psychosis,” she continued.

“I am concerned that most states, including Illinois, are simply not prepared to handle the challenges associated with legalizing recreational marijuana. I would also urge the governor and the legislature to take the time to fully consider the facts and prepare for the consequences before legalizing marijuana in Illinois,” she concluded.

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