

March 10, 2009

TO: Montana House Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Dr. Edwin L. Stickney  
RE: Support HB 541

As a physician, and past president of the Montana Medical Association, I write to urge your support for HB 541.

A few weeks ago, I wrote to you concerning a *medical* marijuana bill, based on my experiences working with and observing medical marijuana patients. Before I considered making any medical marijuana recommendations, I thoroughly reviewed the body of research specific not only to the medical effects of marijuana but also concerning other aspects of marijuana – relating both to the science of the plant and its effects as well as to the history and results of marijuana policies.

**Generally speaking, the body of research conducted on marijuana has produced consistent findings – all in strong support of the regulatory approach taken by HB 541.**

First, our current policy of criminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana has not worked. Despite steadily rising numbers of arrests, marijuana use has increased, and it is apparently more potent, cheaper, and easier to find than ever.

Second, taxpayers have spent steadily increasing amounts of money to emphasize enforcement of marijuana possession crimes. This diverts resources away from focusing on violent crimes, a shocking number of which go unsolved. Many of these crimes could be prevented if we shifted priorities. In other words, our current policy wastes money and the change proposed in HB 541 would get us “more bang for the buck.”

Third, states that have decriminalized possession of small amounts in the manner proposed by HB 541 have experienced *no* increases in marijuana use. In fact, many have seen decreases in marijuana use, and decreases in violent crimes as well. Again, this means that HB 541 offers a smarter approach that could produce superior results.

It is important to keep in mind just how much of what we have heard and believed about marijuana is completely untrue. This is perhaps the most dramatic aspect of all the scientific research that has been done – all of the serious research, published in peer-reviewed professional journals, illustrates the wrong-headedness of our current policy of criminalizing marijuana.

In particular, the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine conducted an intensive investigation of the literature. This study, along with those of every major commission ever to have objectively analyzed the facts, concluded that, contrary to mythology, marijuana is not addictive in the true sense of the term – **nor is marijuana a “gateway” that causes other drug use.**

Those who oppose HB 541 may try to frighten you with claims that scientific research actually has proven are wrong. Please look closely at the documentation offered by this bill's proponents and its opponents – and consider the weight of peer-reviewed scientific support for HB 541's approach.

Because our current policy wastes money while failing to achieve positive results; and because HB 541's approach has been found elsewhere to produce better outcomes without creating new negative results, I hope you will agree that HB 541 deserves your support.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my views, and thank-you for your consideration.

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