



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

February 5, 2019

The Honorable Robert Renny Cushing, Chair
House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 204
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Representative Cushing and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

As the Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester, I write to oppose HB 481 “Relative to the Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis and Making Appropriations Therefor” and urge the Committee to find this bill inexpedient to legislate.

One of the main concerns of the Catholic Church in New Hampshire is promoting the safety and well-being of children and families. HB 481, which aims to commercialize marijuana, does not provide for this most important goal. In fact, the bill does not adequately take into account the threats to children and communities that come with marijuana legalization and commercialization, threats that have been realized in other states that have walked down this path. The bill allows the sale of highly-potent marijuana and marijuana products and the use of delivery mechanisms, such as vaping, that are targeted toward young people. Moreover, there is no roadside test for marijuana impairment like there is for alcohol, so this bill is a serious threat to public safety.

At times, a matter comes before a body such as this for examination, and reasonable people may debate the merits of the topic at hand. In the matter before you under HB 481 – the legalization of recreational marijuana – there is no room for misunderstanding. This is not about a medicinal remedy. It is not about a proposed public policy seeking what is best for the common good. A mind-altering substance that easily may be inhaled or consumed without cumbersome appliances or assistance has been proposed for recreational use by any adult; I urge you to recommend against this approach.

There is still a lot we do not know about the effects of the types of marijuana that are distributed in states where it has been legalized. But we do know based on research and the experience of other states about the impact on the most vulnerable among us. Studies have shown that marijuana harms the learning, memory, and attention functions of the developing brains of young people. We know from the experience of other states, like Colorado, that the use of marijuana in children and pregnant mothers has increased since its legalization.

Representatives from several states, including Colorado and Oregon, reported to members of the New Hampshire Commission, who recently studied legalization, their concerns with edible marijuana products, including accidental overdoses of children consuming marijuana-spiked

brownies, candies, and other innocent looking foods. We also know that in states where marijuana is legalized, distributors increasingly are located in low-income neighborhoods, taking advantage of those in poverty.

After so many years of anti-tobacco campaigns aimed at young and old, the problem of addiction to nicotine is still rampant among the young. Vaping has been found to be just as problematic for its nicotine content and there is a campaign to curtail its availability with, perhaps, the same result among school-aged young people. Alcohol consumption among underage young people continues, despite efforts to curtail this. As we all know, misuse of other drugs is the current crisis we face as a state and nation. In the midst of this crisis, how can our state take on what we know will contribute to impaired judgement and tragic consequences? Stopping an unnecessary and dangerous avenue, like the bill before this Committee, is far more beneficial to family life and society than letting it take root and spread.

Our state continues to struggle with a drug crisis that over the past decade has cost the lives of thousands of people and devastated the lives and health of countless more of our citizens. Instead of legalizing the recreational use of marijuana, I urge our state to focus on efforts that will prevent the misuse of drugs and protect and care for the gifts of life and health. Therefore, I urge you to oppose HB 481 as inexpedient to legislate.

Grateful for your consideration of our concerns with the legalization of marijuana and with deep appreciation for your work serving the citizens of New Hampshire, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter A. Libasci".

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci
Bishop of Manchester