



## DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

February 1, 2017

The Honorable David Welch, Chair  
Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 305  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

**Re: HB 640 (Relative to the Penalties for Possession of Marijuana)**

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

As Director of the Office of Public Policy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester, and on behalf of Bishop Peter Libasci, I write to express our **opposition to HB 640**, a bill modifying the penalties for possession of marijuana.

Marijuana represents a significant part of substance abuse in the United States and adversely affects the health of many Americans. The widespread use and abuse of marijuana, particularly by young people under the age of eighteen, is steadily increasing while scientific evidence clearly links its long-term damaging effects on brain development. "When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, the drug may reduce thinking, memory and learning functions and affect how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions. Marijuana's effects on these abilities may last a long time or even be permanent."<sup>1</sup>

Reducing the penalties for possession of a drug that causes devastating effects on the human body, particularly for our youth, is not a path New Hampshire should take. Our attention should be focused on preventing the use and abuse of drugs.

The Catholic Church teaches that life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God and that we must take reasonable care of them.<sup>2</sup> "The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense."<sup>3</sup>

We urge the committee to **report HB 640 as inexpedient to legislate**. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and your service to the people of New Hampshire.

Sincerely,

Meredith P. Cook, Esq.  
Director, Office of Public Policy

<sup>1</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ). *Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2015. HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50.

<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2288)

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2291)