

Testimony of Ken Winters, PhD. regarding cannabis legalization bill, SF 73

February 9, 2023

Members of the Senate Environment, Climate and Legacy Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in opposition to cannabis bill SF 73.

I am Ken Winters, PhD., a long-standing research in drug abuse, with 20 years of it while a professor in psychiatry at the University of Minnesota. I also co-founded Smart Approaches to Marijuana Minnesota. We are the state affiliate of the national group, Smart Approaches to Marijuana. I am very knowledgeable about the research and science of cannabis use. It is my expert view that using cannabis greatly increases the risk to the user of numerous health and safety problems. This conclusion is also confirmed by the National Academy of Sciences, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute on Mental Health.

But in my research on cannabis and health, I have also learned that cannabis agriculture can greatly strain energy systems and contribute to the greenhouse gas effect. Here is sampling of what I have learned:

“In short, indoor cannabis grow facilities can be energy hogs.” The Smart Energy Design Assistance Center; <https://smartenergy.illinois.edu/why-the-cannabis-industry-needs-energy-efficiency/>

“The most significant environmental effect of cannabis production is energy consumption, especially fossil energy use with climate effects from release of greenhouse gas.” BOTECH Analysis, UC Berkeley; https://lcb.wa.gov/publications/Marijuana/SEPA/BOTECH_Whitepaper_Final.pdf

“Research suggests that cannabis production in the United States is responsible for the same amount of electricity used by 1.7 million homes.” CleanLeaf; <https://cleanleaf.com/cannabis-cultivation-leaves-behind-a-large-energy-footprint.php>

“Pacific Power in Portland experienced seven blackouts traced to marijuana production facilities the summer after Oregon legalized recreational marijuana. Forty-five percent of Denver’s “load growth,” or increase in energy demand, is for electricity to power marijuana.” National Conference of State Legislatures; <https://www.ncsl.org/energy/electricity-use-in-marijuana-production>

If there are concerns that our state over-criminalizes cannabis users, then decriminalize it and expunge the records of those convicted of a minor possession. But passing this bill is not healthy for Minnesota’s citizens or its environment.

I urge the committee to oppose SF 73.

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