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To: Coriell, Scott
Subject: OpEd from Gov. Peter Shumlin

Please find below and op-ed from Gov. Peter Shumlin.

Thanks,

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The Time is Now to Take a Smarter Approach on Marijuana

By Gov. Peter Shumlin

Last month, the Vermont Senate passed a bill to end the failed War on Drugs policy of marijuana prohibition in Vermont. This was a big step forward for our state. Bringing marijuana out of the shadows of prohibition is a smarter approach to regulating a substance that over 80,000 Vermonters admit to using on a monthly basis. It makes no sense that we tell those Vermonters that possessing an ounce of marijuana is no more serious than speeding, but then we tell them they must go buy it from a drug dealer who could care less what else they sell or how young their customers are.

Many Vermonters get this. According to a recent poll from Vermont Public Radio, nearly 55 percent of Vermonters favor legalization, while only 32 percent oppose it. Even many of those who oppose the current legislation recognize that as other states act, Vermont will eventually move forward with legalization. The question has now become not if Vermont should legalize marijuana but when.

On that question it's time for Vermont to act, and not just because the right policy is to fix the broken system we have now. In the coming years, Vermont could very well end up surrounded by legal marijuana markets as states to our south and east, as well as a country to our north, all move towards legalization. This fall, Massachusetts voters will go to the polls to vote on a referendum to legalize marijuana. A poll of Massachusetts voters indicates that a majority support legalization. Colorado, Washington State, Washington D.C., Oregon, and Alaska have all voted to legalize marijuana in similar votes. New Hampshire legislators have been seriously debating legalization legislation, which even passed the House in that state. Canada's recently elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to legalize marijuana in that country. Maine and Rhode Island are also considering referendums to legalize marijuana in the coming years.

Vermont has a clear choice. As states nationwide and those close to home continue working to enact smarter policies around marijuana, we can be the first state to do it right. We can lift the veil of prohibition that has prevented us from taking rational steps to address all the issues that

come with marijuana use that exist right now, given that one in eight Vermonters uses the substance on a monthly basis. Or we can choose to delay making the right policy choice, continuing to bury our heads in the sand and hope that a policy that has failed for decades will all of the sudden start working.

The stakes are important. The bill passed by the Vermont Senate would represent the most careful, deliberate attempt to regulate marijuana in America. Before passing the bill, the Senate took testimony from experts, asked the right questions, and learned lessons from those states that have legalized marijuana already. The result is a bill to create a system which would represent a huge improvement over the status quo. It would ban the sale of edibles which have caused so many problems in Colorado. It would also allow us to drive out the black market and the illegal drug dealers that come with it, do a better job than we currently do of keeping marijuana out of the hands of underage kids, deal with the drugged drivers who are already driving on our roads, address treatment, and educate Vermonters to the harmful effects of consuming marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes.

That approach is in stark contrast to the one proposed in the Massachusetts referendum that will be voted on in November, which would allow edibles that have caused huge problems in other states, smoking lounges, home delivery service, and possession of up to 10 ounces of marijuana. Vermont's bill allows none of that. If Massachusetts moves forward with their legalization bill while Vermont delays, the entire southern part of our state could end up with all the negatives of a bad pot bill and none of the positives of doing the right thing.

The choice in front of Vermonters and their elected representatives in the next couple of months is whether we want our state to take a rational step to end an antiquated War on Drugs policy that almost everyone agrees has failed. We can take a smarter approach in Vermont and be prepared for whatever other states around us do. But we must have the courage to do it.