

Marijuana bill: notes on testimony by public safety officials

January 12, 2016

Paul Doucette, Chief of Bennington Police Department & Chair of VT Chiefs Association

- The Vermont Chief's Association is opposed to legalization
- Believes in gateway drug theory. Offered anecdotal evidence from Vermonters on heroin who started with marijuana.
- Suggests waiting and seeing what happens both with respect to a) other states like Colorado and b) how the federal government reacts
- Implies that it is unclear how we could enforce illegal transportation of Vermont-grown marijuana out of state (if it were legalized)
- States that it would be very difficult for law enforcement to regulate the particulars of home-grown marijuana, i.e. the quantity of plants allowed in a household
- Colorado uses blood tests to confirm the presence of marijuana. The committee and the officer discussed whether or not using field sobriety testing was sufficient for on-the-spot determination of intoxication. The conclusion was that it is less efficient than the breathalyzer test for alcohol intoxication.
- "We are not prepared for this"
- We might need to utilize the resources of an out of state chemist, which could cost \$10,000
- We only have one DRE in Bennington County, and he is a state trooper. If the trooper is unavailable for some reason, the suspect has to be transported to Windham County for testing by a DRE. This process takes considerable time for the officers.
- DRE is a labor-intensive process (it can take 3-4 hours, including writing the required report)
- Sen. Benning suggested channeling revenue from marijuana legalization to fund either more DRE positions or resources for DREs
- If marijuana is legalized, proper training should be included in the curriculum by the VT Criminal Justice Training Counsel

Steve Benard, Rutland County Sheriff

- The Vermont Sheriffs Association is opposed to legalization
- In Vermont, we have 40-45 DREs, compared to 1,700 police officers
- There is a major shortage of DREs in southern VT. Rutland County has 3 DREs, none of whom are members of the Rutland County Sheriff's Department.
- The data coming out of Colorado is poor and inconclusive with respect to many matters (i.e. changes in car crashes, abuse, etc. since legalization). Based on rough anecdotal evidence, these factors have gotten worse since legalization.
- Colorado saw a 24% increase in school-related drug issues in 2014 following legalization
 - Colorado also saw the highest number of school marijuana violations in a decade (951), which the Sheriff believes is due to greater social acceptance and kids acquiring marijuana from their parents without their knowledge
- The proper tools for efficiently testing marijuana intoxication have yet to be developed

- Marijuana derivatives are extremely dangerous and potent
- The process of making marijuana wax is extremely dangerous. It is very similar to the process of making meth. The Sheriff saw buildings that had been blown up in Colorado as a result of the process.
- Legalization won't eliminate the black market
 - Non-law abiding citizens will continue to buy marijuana on the black market (as they do now), since it is cheaper on the street
- Drug cartels aren't going away as a result of Colorado legalization, even though Denver was a major distribution center for them. They are simply moving deeper into opium and meth distribution.
- Colorado saw huge increases in emergency room visits in tourist areas
- "Take this slow, treat Colorado as a laboratory"