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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 26, 2016

Gov. Shumlin Statement on Bill to Legalize Marijuana in Vermont

MONTPELIER – Gov. Peter Shumlin and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Richard Sears (D-Bennington) today detailed legislation to cautiously and deliberately legalize marijuana in Vermont. The move comes after the Governor announced in his State of the State Address that he and Senator Sears would work to draft common-sense legislation to better regulate and eliminate the black market for a substance that over 80,000 Vermonters – almost one in eight – already report using on a monthly basis.

“The War on Drugs has failed when it comes to marijuana prohibition,” Gov. Shumlin said. “Under the status quo, marijuana use is widespread, Vermonters have little difficulty procuring it for personal use, and the shadows of prohibition make it nearly impossible to address key issues like prevention, keeping marijuana out of the hands of minors, and dealing with those driving under the influence who are already on Vermont’s roads. The system has failed. The question for us is how do we deal with that failure. Vermont can take a smarter approach that regulates marijuana in a thoughtful way, and this bill provides a framework for us to do that.”

In his State of the State Address, the Governor outlined five principles he will insist on in any legislation to legalize marijuana.

- A legal market must keep marijuana and other drugs out of the hands of underage kids. With 83 percent of Vermont youth saying that marijuana is easy or somewhat easy to obtain, the current system doesn’t do this.
- The tax imposed must be low enough to wipe out the black market and get rid of the illegal drug dealers.
- Revenue from legalization must be used to expand addiction prevention programs.
- Law enforcement’s capacity to improve the response to impaired drivers under the influence of marijuana who are already on Vermont’s roads must be strengthened.
- The sale of edibles must be prohibited at first.

“The legislation outlined today meets these criteria,” Gov. Shumlin said. “I want to thank Senator Sears for his thoughtful approach on this issue.”

Because Vermont has already taken steps to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana, the legislation introduced today does not require repealing any criminal penalties under Vermont law.

On the critical issue of keeping marijuana out of the hands of underage kids, the legislation outlines a number of steps, including:

- No person under the age of 21 will be permitted on the premises of a marijuana establishment.
- Advertising and labeling may not be used to appeal to children or youth.
- Marijuana establishments are prohibited from being located within 1,000 feet of a school or child care center.
- And civil and criminal penalties will be established for furnishing marijuana to those under 21. Current civil and criminal penalties will also remain in place for those using or possessing marijuana underage.

In order to improve the response to impaired drivers under the influence of marijuana, alcohol, and other substances already on Vermont's roads, the legislation calls for ten additional law enforcement officers to be trained as drug recognition experts and an additional 25 new State Troopers to be added over the next three years. It also calls for the Governor's Highway Safety Program to expand its public education and prevention campaign to discourage impaired or drugged driving and adds to Vermont's open container law, preventing its use in a motor vehicle.

Going forward, the Senate Health and Welfare Committee will work with the Department of Health to include prevention provisions and the Senate Finance Committee will work to set a tax rate that undercuts the black market, both priorities of the Governor.

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