

Westchester County Chiefs of Police Association

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January 28, 2019

The Westchester County Chiefs of Police Association is made up of the Police Chiefs, Commissioners, and Command Staff of the 50 agencies that provide public safety services to the County of Westchester in the State of New York. In response to Governor Cuomo's effort to push for the rapid legalization of regulated marijuana in New York State, we as an organization feel compelled to offer our opinion, as stakeholders dealing with the aftermath of such legislation. For the record, our organization was not consulted regarding this initiative.

The Westchester County Chiefs of Police Association is vehemently opposed to the passage of any legislation that would legalize commercially grown recreational marijuana. We are in agreement with the opinion of the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police. They have recently stated their opposition to regulated marijuana legalization.

The Westchester County Chiefs are opposed to legalization based on public safety and public health concerns.

The instances of impaired driving will increase proportionally with the proliferation of regulated marijuana. Simply stated, there will be an increase in impaired driving under the influence of marijuana. This will endanger the general public and increase the number of injuries and fatalities on the roadways of New York State. The state of Colorado has already experienced an increase in impaired driving and vehicular crashes according to the data. Marijuana related traffic deaths in Colorado increased 66% between the four-year averages before and after legalization according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. New York State would be no different. The legislature has been concerned in the past with the safety of drivers and passengers in vehicles. There are laws requiring the usage of safety belts, car seats and booster seats for children, prohibitions on the usage of handheld devices while driving, all legislated with public safety in mind. We would implore the legislature to consider the negative ramifications of legalization on public safety versus the desire of some seeking financial gain and a segment of the public that crave easier access to a potentially dangerous intoxicant.

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Our organization is concerned about the negative effects that legalization will have on adolescents. Despite what others may proclaim, we believe that marijuana is a “gateway” drug. Illicit sales and distribution will not evaporate with legalization. Illicit sales will likely be stimulated and fueled by offering a lower cost alternative to regulated sales. This has already occurred in states that have legalization. Dispensaries may abide by age restrictions, but the black market created will not. Adolescents will have easier access to the drug. A drug, which the American Public Health Association reports the health effects are not fully known. The illicit marijuana will continue to have unregulated potencies and unknown adulterants.

Our organization has additional concerns regarding the consumption of the legalized cannabis. It is either ingested or smoked. The edibles are often packaged and designed to look like candy or snacks. The designs are attractive to young children and will likely cause accidental overdoses. Data has shown that marijuana related emergency room visits in Colorado and Oregon have significantly increased after legalization. Over the last few years, New York State has sponsored an aggressive campaign of public service announcements on television to enlighten people on the dangers and consequences of cigarette smoking. It is ironic that this same vigilance appears non-existent when it concerns marijuana.

The governor recently projected revenue from legalization of \$300 million dollars. If history is a guide, it has been reported that Colorado has generated about half of what was projected and California generated only about one quarter of revenue projections. Our organization will predict that the actual costs of dealing with addiction, traffic crashes, and enforcement will far surpass any revenue that is generated. This is what has occurred in states that have legalized regulated marijuana. We feel that any financial benefit from the taxation of regulated marijuana will be eclipsed by the cost of escalating health issues and by the cost of human lives.

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In closing, there are many issues regarding legalization that were not covered in this letter that will have a direct negative effect on policing in Westchester County and throughout New York State. Our membership is willing to discuss this complex issue with the representatives of the legislature in an effort to provide them with a common sense law enforcement perspective.

Very truly yours,

Paul J. Oliva

President of the Westchester County
Chiefs of Police Association