

March 2, 2020

To the distinguished members of the Connecticut legislative body,

I am the Reverend, Edwin Pérez Jr., pastor-member of Manantial de Gracia United Church of Christ (UCC), West Hartford, CT; member of the Board of Directors of the Southern New England Conference UCC; and New Haven resident/activist.

I urge you to consider Governor Lamont's bill for the legalization and regulation of recreational marijuana, given the following realities.

- Per factual national research within the last 10 years, possible through the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Black and Brown individuals continue to be arrested disproportionately, more times than White individuals, thus hurting our communities of color the most in the name of the war marijuana, despite similar usage rates.
- Many of those arrested, especially the people of color affected by this the most, will benefit from the expunging of their previous marijuana-related convictions, allowing for them to have a second chance at improving their lives and increasing their access to jobs.
- The illicit purchase and sale of marijuana has proven to be far more dangerous to public health, when people resort to buying often chemically laced and dangerous synthetic marijuana, instead of having access to a far safer substance, when used responsibly.
- Since our poor communities still manage to purchase what they hope to be natural marijuana, the regulation of a legalized substance will be a much greater method of increasing public health, rather than allowing for situations like the New Haven

Green terrible overdose, leaving up to 100 affected and brought to the hospital in 2018.

- There are opportunities for portions of the revenue of recreational marijuana sales from trusted and regulated sources to go toward the communities that have suffered the most as well as to addiction services/clinics currently assisting individuals in need.

These, among many other moral and just reasons, which I am sure will be brought your attention again, are the most compelling and sensible to consider. Each of you have been entrusted with the responsibility to create and amend statutes to the benefit of the whole as well as the most marginalized of individuals. I see how my community suffers, instead of being dealt with compassion and being offered resources to encourage better choices; they are treated as criminals, although most of them have never committed other crimes.

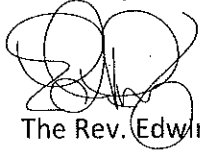
I pray you will decide accordingly for the legalization of recreational marijuana, because we cannot begin to affect the disproportionate treatment of people of color affected by this, nor begin to improve public health, until we regulate cannabis and allow for trusted suppliers, instead of allowing the poor to risk their lives with dangerous synthetics (e.g. K2, among others) and contaminations of other unknown drugs we may not be able to combat.

Any drug problems that individuals face in our state should be treated as a matter of public health and not as a crime issue. The ACLU estimated a mean spending of approximately \$4 Billion dollars enforcing marijuana laws, which is money we could use in our schools, addiction education programs, among other needs. I have no doubt that succeeding the passing of this bill, crime will subside also, as it did after the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The only way we can regulate recreational and natural cannabis, that has not shown to be any more dangerous than alcohol, is by legalizing it first. Then, and only then, can we grow to being a stronger, safer, and more productive state.

We States can make a difference so that our Federal Government can follow in our footsteps, and together we can become better stewards of our nation. Legislators, you have the power to move Connecticut in a better direction along with our Governor, as elected officials. Despite

other misguided clergy and their threatening with their votes, there are a faithful remnant that understand the true consequences of the way things have always been. 65% of the population will stand with you in support of a new way in treating this matter (GQR Connecticut Poll, 2020) I am praying fervently that you hear this matter of justice and act in the equitable interest of your people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edwin Pérez Jr.', with a stylized, cursive script.

The Rev. Edwin Pérez Jr.