

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6915
AN ACT CONCERNING CANNABIS USE PREVENTION EFFORTS RELATED
Title: TO YOUTH.
Vote Date: 3/27/2023
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/22/2023
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

With the legalization of marijuana use for adults, it has become increasingly important to protect and prevent our youth from using marijuana. This bill makes changes regarding the funding for cannabis and substance use prevention programs specifically targeting our youth. The bill provides the following:

- Increases the share of cannabis tax revenue earmarked for the Prevention and Recovery Services Fund from 25% to 30% for FY 2024 through FY 2028.
- Requires, as currently in the law, that the monies in the prevention fund be used to support prevention, treatment and recovery services as provided by youth service bureaus, regional behavioral health organizations or local advisory councils.
- Requires the funding be used to develop a public awareness campaign regarding the mental and physical risks of youth cannabis use, including use during a pregnancy.
- In addition, requires the funding be used by the Alcohol and Drug Policy Council (ADPC) to collect and analyze data pertaining to cannabis use by January 1, 2024 and report its findings annually starting by January 1, 2025.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Nancy Navarretta, Commissioner, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS):

DHMAS is the agency mandated to promote services aimed at supporting mental health and providing services to prevent substance misuse. DHMAS prevention efforts currently ongoing

or in development related to cannabis include the statewide "Be in the Know" multi-media campaign which disseminates information to local organizations including schools. DHMAS is also developing a merchant education and compliance program. DHMAS respectfully requests the Committee consider the language in Section 2 of this bill which would require the Prevention and Recovery Services to fund, at a minimum, 133 prevention organizations. DHMAS does not have the capacity to monitor funding distributed in this manner. Funding appropriated in this manner could potentially limit the ability to address treatment and recovery services with fund dollars.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Thomas Burr, Public Policy Manager, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):

As the country's largest grassroots mental health organization, NAMI has opposed the legalization of cannabis but regrettably it is too late in Connecticut. However, NAMI supports this bill and the funding adjustments needed to support prevention aimed at our youth. NAMI recommends that, besides prevention and treatment options, a portion of any revenue from the cannabis industry should be used to research the effects of cannabis on the developing brain.

Allison Fulton, Executive Director, Western CT Coalition, a Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO):

Ms. Fulton points out that for several years, regional youth surveys indicate a decrease in the "perception of risk" around cannabis. This is also true regarding pregnant and nursing mothers who use cannabis and are not informed of the associated harm to an infant. There is still so much we do not know about the consequences of non-medical cannabis legalization. However, multiple strategies across many sectors are a great start and she urges the funding be invested in the RBHAOs whose structures are effective, efficient and engage in the local communities.

Mary Seidner, Executive Director, Lyme's' Youth Service Bureau (LYSB):

Legal retail cannabis is now in Connecticut and 103 Youth Service Bureaus are feeling the impact. LYSB continues to conduct prevention activities in our community. However, certain facts are important to share. The average age of first use marijuana in our community is 14 years old. By 12th grade only 29% of students feel regular use of marijuana is harmful. Students in our community who have used marijuana in the last 30 days also report that they often use THC (the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis) to "cope"; something not seen with alcohol use. LYSB supports this bill as a necessary step to addressing these issues.

Kiersten Naumann, member Executive Committee of the CT Association of Prevention Professionals (CAPP):

Ms. Naumann points out that products containing THC and packaged to look like existing candies and snack foods are being sold at non-licensed gas stations and vape shops across the state. Recently, two communities in Fairfield County found that 8 out of 14 gas stations had these products on their shelves. Currently, the small amount of funding received from DHMAS is restricted to prevention of vaping. There is no funding for cannabis prevention. CAPP supports the adjustments made in this bill.

Daniel Freess, MD, Past President, CT College of Emergency Physicians:

Dr. Freess shares that he is not speaking against decriminalization, legal or judicial reforms, or the use of medical cannabis .However, to simply continue after legalization of cannabis without increased safeguards and considerations of the effects of cannabis use on our youth would be negligent. Dr. Freess supports the efforts in this bill.

The following organizations submitted testimony in support:

- John O'Connor, New Milford Youth Agency
- Scott Cochran, CT Youth Services Association
- Pamela Mautte, Alliance for Prevention and Wellness
- CT State Medical Association (CSMS)
- Danielle Guillaume- Sittol, Department of Human Services, Greenwich
- Ginne-Rae Clay, Social Equity Council
- Angela Duhaime, Southeastern Regional Action Council
- Duncan Markovich, Better Ways, LLC

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: April 11, 2023