

Laura Notini
NORML Women's Alliance
Testimony for hearing on S.6005
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Hello, my name is Laura Notini and I am the regional coordinator for the NORML Women's Alliance in the New York area. The NORML Women's Alliance is a non-profit organization affiliated with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. I am here today to support Bill S.6005, which would enact the "marihuana regulation and taxation act." I believe that this act is an effective measure for creating a more cost-effective, practical and sensible marijuana policy in New York State.

This bill seeks to make retail marijuana available to adults over the age of 21, and that makes a lot of sense. Marijuana has a rich history of use throughout human existence, and it is only in the last century that it had been vilified and made illegal. It has been shown that it is significantly less harmful than alcohol, a drug which can be purchased for responsible adult consumption by those over the age of 21 all over our state and country. No one has ever fatally overdosed on marijuana, nor does it cause physical addiction with habitual use. The same cannot be said about alcohol. The 1972 National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse found "Rather than inducing violent or aggressive behavior through its purported effects of lowering inhibitions, weakening impulse control and heightening aggressive tendencies, marihuana was usually found to inhibit the expression of aggressive impulses by pacifying the user, interfering with muscular coordination, reducing psychomotor activities and generally producing states of drowsiness lethargy, timidity and passivity." The first set of qualities are things commonly associated with alcohol intoxication. Adults should have the option to choose something safer.

Marijuana is not dangerous, prohibition is. Prohibition of marijuana creates a climate in which children are at higher risk, racism is prevalent and vital fiscal opportunities are ignored. It creates violence, from those engaged in the dealings of a black market and from the law enforcement officers attempting to enforce laws that are not effective. The criminal prohibition of marijuana has done nothing to deter the use and distribution of the plant. This can be rectified with the passage of S.6005, which will establish a system so that otherwise law abiding citizens can operate fully within the law on a day to day basis.

Let's talk about children. A federal study from National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that it is easier for teens to procure marijuana than beer. Drug dealers don't ID. Age restriction is just one way that legalizing marijuana and setting up proper channels of distribution will be safer, keeping retail cannabis to those who are over the age of 21 and can engage in responsible adult use. Studies based on states that have implemented medical marijuana laws have shown that relaxed marijuana policies have not caused an increase in adolescent use rates.

This bill protects families. No longer will parents or parents-to-be have their children taken by government agencies just for choosing to have a joint rather than a glass of wine after a long day. Though it is usually men that are incarcerated, their absence in the home can be devastating to mothers and families.

This bill protects futures. By adopting a more functional marijuana policy in New York, young adults will no longer be saddled with criminal records that last a lifetime and prevent opportunities for education and advancement just for a simple marijuana infraction. The people being arrested for small marijuana possession are disproportionately young, male and Black or Hispanic. Disproportionately because there is no evidence that young Black or Hispanic males use marijuana at a rate higher than others, in fact there is evidence to support that they do not.

Two states that have recognized and legalized marijuana for responsible adult use, and we can look to Washington and Colorado and see that this is a system that can be effectively implemented. On a recent visit to Colorado I was pleasantly surprised to see retail marijuana customers waiting patiently for over an hour to purchase their products at a retail marijuana store. There is clearly a demand for a system such as this, and it is irresponsible to ignore this potential for tax revenue.

S.6005 clearly states the ways in which marijuana will be taxed and that the tax revenue will go to assist in areas such as reentry support services for individuals released from prison after serving time for drug-related offenses, towards drug abuse prevention and treatment programs, and to job training programs in areas with significant poverty rates or unemployment rates. In addition there is tax money that would go into a general fund, and cities or towns can opt to impose an additional tax to further benefit their communities. After spending time in Colorado, I

can say with confidence that consumers of marijuana are just waiting for the opportunity to happily pay tax and be within the boundaries of the law.

Colorado has implemented a functional system for retail sales of marijuana and it's going smoothly. We can look to states that have implemented dispensaries for medical marijuana and find that the presence of these dispensaries does not increase crime in the areas that they are located, crime rates actually fall. I firmly believe that passing S.6005 is the correct course of action. For the safety of children and families, for the gained tax revenue, to change a defunct system into something productive, regulation of the sale and production of marijuana for responsible adult usage must be passed.