

December 4, 2014

Medical Marijuana Study Committee  
213 Gressette Building  
P.O. Box 142  
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Dear Members of the Medical Marijuana Study Committee,

We write to you today to express our collective concerns regarding the direction of the Medical Marijuana Study Committee and the potential for legalizing medical marijuana in the State of South Carolina. Before we go any further, it should be understood that the purpose of this letter is not to debate the positive or negative health aspects of medical marijuana. Rather, we come as a unified group of public servants who want nothing more than to serve and protect our communities and to do all that we can to create the greatest quality of life for the citizens of South Carolina. With that being said, we implore you to consider the unintended consequences of legalizing medical marijuana.

We realize that legalizing marijuana is not a new topic of discussion. As of today, twenty-three states in the United States have legalized some form of marijuana consumption. Despite the best efforts of many legislatures across the country, many of those states are dealing with unexpected problems related to the processes by which marijuana (recreational or medical) is received, cultivated, distributed, prescribed and consumed. These problems are due in large part due to the federal government's inability or unwillingness to address marijuana consumption. If the federal government were to take action, we believe several of these unexpected problems would be resolved. Ultimately, it is our opinion that every state, regardless of legislative action on the state level, will continue to experience problems, especially from a law enforcement perspective, until the federal government takes action.

With that being said, we were encouraged to see the General Assembly pass legislation this year that we felt would prepare South Carolina to respond in a positive manner if the federal government were to take action to address marijuana's status as an illegal substance. Initially, we felt the Medical Marijuana Study Committee intended to bring the necessary stakeholders to the table in order to properly prepare our state in the event federal action was taken. It seems, however, that the intent of this Study Committee has moved away from its statutory purpose, which is to submit a report to the General Assembly that at a minimum must address, "methods and procedures for cultivating medical marijuana in the State, the amount of tax to impose on the sale of medical marijuana, the need for an agricultural marketing plan for the sale and use of medical marijuana, and the impact of the sale and use of medical marijuana on public health and wellness." The ideas and testimonies that have been presented at the Committee's public meetings thus far certainly seem to imply, if not outright endorse, the legalization of medical

marijuana, or possibly even recreational marijuana use, whether the federal government takes action or not. These implications give us great concern. We believe that legalizing marijuana of any form, without the federal government's approval, will only exacerbate law enforcement's efforts to combat illegal drug use and prescription drug abuse and will weaken our ability to properly protect and serve our communities as a whole.

We have all seen and heard the stories of how medical marijuana can help individuals who suffer with seizures, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other debilitating illnesses. Collectively, our hearts break for those individuals. We want to do everything within our power to bring relief and comfort to those who suffer, but as law enforcement officers, and individuals who are entrusted to live by and enforce the laws of this state, we must stop short of condoning relief that comes through an illegal manner. We fear that our State's attempt to bring relief and comfort to a very small, yet important segment of our population, will create an environment that will yield greater illegal drug use and increase the already heavy burden on the law enforcement community to protect and serve our state.

Those fears have become a reality in Arizona. Arizona became the fourteenth state in the United States to legalize medical marijuana in November 2010. The third annual statistical report for the Arizona Medical Marijuana Program was released earlier this year and revealed some very interesting facts. As of June 30, 2014, 52,374 individuals had been approved to legally purchase medical marijuana in Arizona. Nearly 72% of those approved were male and the highest age demographic among men was between the ages of 18 and 30. They represented 32% of all male users, numbering about 9,500. Approximately, 71% of all individuals approved to purchase medical marijuana indicated "severe and chronic pain" as their only debilitating medical condition. While we certainly do not mean to cast doubt upon an individual's health condition, it is at least a little curious that the largest consumer of medical marijuana in Arizona is males between the ages of 18 and 30. Typically, these individuals are in the healthiest stages of their lives, but for some reason, unusually high numbers of this demographic seems to be suffering from chronic pain in Arizona. Furthermore, 60% of the patients approved in Arizona were certified by only 25 physicians. Again, we do not mean to cast doubt on those doctors, but it is again very curious that such a high number of individuals have been approved by such a low number of physicians. Based on these numbers, it certainly seems, that despite the Arizona Legislature's best efforts, their system is showing signs to show signs of abuse. Unfortunately, this is a national trend and is not only happening in Arizona. Again, we are of the opinion that states will continue to see these types of problems until the federal government takes action. Without their action, local law enforcement officials will have to face these growing problems on their own.

As we said, we do not come to debate the positive and negative health aspects of marijuana. We are not a medical doctors. We can, however, speak to the lives that we have seen destroyed due to the abuse of marijuana. We have seen individuals become so dependent on marijuana that they have lost their jobs, their spouses, their children, and their overall livelihood. We cannot begin to tell you how many burglaries and car accidents are caused, at least in part, by marijuana. With that being said, we cannot help but believe that cracking the door to allow

medical marijuana will open the door to increased marijuana usage in many demographics, not just for individuals who need medical relief. Furthermore, we believe that the legalization of marijuana will increase the perception that marijuana is harmless, particularly among youth, leading to an increase in use, dependence, and the consequences that stem from drug abuse.

While there is great debate about the positive and negative health aspects of consuming marijuana, no one can deny that marijuana is a mind altering drug and has the potential to cause individuals to act irrationally or in an unsafe manner. We fear that legalizing medical marijuana will lead to increased incidences of impaired driving while under the influence of marijuana resulting in additional highway injuries and deaths.

When considering the legalization of medical marijuana, we cannot ignore the problems that are currently facing the law enforcement communities in states that have legalized marijuana use. According to the new report by the Rocky Mountain - High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area entitled “The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact,” the impact of legalized marijuana in Colorado has resulted in:

- 1. The majority of DUI drug arrests involve marijuana and 25 to 40 percent were marijuana alone.*
- 2. In 2012, 10.47 percent of Colorado youth ages 12 to 17 were considered current marijuana users compared to 7.55 percent nationally. Colorado ranked fourth in the nation, and was 39 percent higher than the national average.*
- 3. Drug-related student suspensions/expulsions increased 32 percent from school years 2008-09 through 2012-13, the vast majority were for marijuana violations.*
- 4. In 2012, 26.81 percent of college age students were considered current marijuana users compared to 18.89 percent nationally, which ranks Colorado third in the nation and 42 percent above the national average.*
- 5. In 2013, 48.4 percent of Denver adult arrestees tested positive for marijuana, which is a 16 percent increase from 2008.*
- 6. From 2011 through 2013 there was a 57 percent increase in marijuana-related emergency room visits.*
- 7. Hospitalizations related to marijuana has increased 82 percent since 2008.*

Our brothers and sisters in law enforcement in the State of Washington are also dealing with a number of issues related to the legalization of marijuana. One issue, in particular, should be troubling to potential marijuana dispensaries and the public at large. While the State of Washington has legalized medical and recreational marijuana usage, the federal government still considers the drug to be an illegal substance. This creates a very interesting situation when

marijuana dispensaries across the State of Washington are collecting money, but cannot find a bank to take the money out of fear that the federal government will take action and potentially seize the funds. This twist has led to owners of marijuana dispensaries carrying or storing hundreds of thousands of dollars either in their stores, on their person, or at their homes. Obviously, this puts a huge target on their backs and has led to an increase in armed robberies.

Regardless of the positive or negative health aspects of marijuana, we cannot deny that marijuana has been a contributor to unrest and illegal activity in our communities. While we are sympathetic to the needs of those who are hurting, we simply cannot endorse this concept at this time. Regardless of your action, the federal government still considers marijuana to be an illegal substance, the FDA has yet to confirm that medical marijuana is safe for consumption, and no state has created a safe system to ensure medical marijuana is properly packaged, dispensed, and consumed. In a day and time when law enforcement officials in South Carolina are doing all that we can to combat prescription drug abuse and illegal drug use, I believe legalizing medical marijuana will increase our struggle and create greater burdens for our communities.

In closing, we again want to emphasize that we are merely public servants who want nothing more than to serve and protect my community and to do all that we can to create the highest quality of life for the citizens South Carolina. We do not intend to be adversarial or insensitive in regards to this matter. In fact, we do not oppose any efforts of the Medical Marijuana Study Committee that will positively prepare our state if federal action is taken to change marijuana's illegal status. We simply believe that federal action is required before any type of marijuana use should become legal in South Carolina. Until such action is taken, we feel the unintended consequences of legalizing medical marijuana outweigh the potential positive side effects and ask that you consider our comments when making your decision.

We thank you for your willingness to hear our concerns. We stand ready to work further with the members of the Medical Marijuana Study Committee and the General Assembly on this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Sincerely,

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Sheriff Chuck Wright  
President, SC Sheriffs' Association

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Chief Mark A. Keel  
South Carolina Law Enforcement Division

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Colonel Mike Oliver  
President, SCLEOA

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Chief Dan Reynolds  
President, SC Police Chiefs Association