October 20, 2010

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
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(925) 313–6311
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Sub: Oppose Proposition 19

Dear Honorable Members of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors:

Over the last six months, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board (AODAB) of Contra Costa County has reviewed perspectives, studies and opinions from numerous local professional people, public and private sector, and other citizens concerning Proposition 19, The Regulate, Control and Tax Cannabis Act of 2010 currently on the November 2nd statewide ballot. This measure does not address or consider the “medicinal” properties of cannabis. A complete list of presenters who addressed our Board and some of the material and documents that were reviewed by our membership is attached.

In fulfilling the Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board’s mission to assess family and community needs regarding alcohol and drug abuse problems, and after careful and thoughtful consideration, on August 25, 2010 the Board voted 5-1 (with the chair abstaining) to recommend that, should the Board of Supervisors choose to take a position, the Board oppose Proposition 19. We believe that the following edited points from the California Society of Addiction Medicine (CSAM) issue paper, CSAM Statement on the Medical Aspects of Marijuana Legalization (also attached), substantially reflects our reasoning:

I. Effects of marijuana on the human body
1. Marijuana is a mood-altering drug that mimics the brain’s own chemistry and causes dependency when used frequently in high doses.
2. Because brain development, including areas targeted by marijuana, is not complete until 24 years old, child and adolescent use of marijuana is accompanied by far higher risk that adult used. Therefore, adolescents should be strongly encouraged to avoid, or delay, use. 1
3. The percentage of marijuana users who develop abuse or dependence within the first two years of their use is highest among those who begin using in early adolescence, falling from over 17% at 13 years old to 4.4% with those who start using at 21 years old 2

II. Treatment for adolescent marijuana abusers should be universally available, not punishment
It would be inconsistent to legalize marijuana for those over 21 and continue a punitive approach for those under 21 when the rationale for restricting access for those under 21 is a major public health concern. Punishment should only be used as an avenue for treatment. If California chooses to further legitimize
marijuana for adults by voting for legalization, treatment for adolescents abusing marijuana should be universally available.

III. Revenue stream for treatment
Of the 250,000 adolescents needing treatment for chemical dependence in California today, only 1 is small fraction of the damage caused by these two drugs. If the citizens of California choose to legalize another addictive substance, SCAM strongly urges a create a tax source and fee revenue to be dedicated to fund the prevention and treatment of physical and mental illnesses and substance abuse problem linked to the use of cannabis.

IV. Further Evaluation
It is not known whether legalizing marijuana would increase or decrease adolescents’ access to marijuana; however, we do know that there is a strong correlation between access and availability, which will likely increase harm to public health. It is difficult to have confidence on the same policies and procedures that are currently in place to limit underage drinking will effectively limit underage marijuana use. Any move to legalize marijuana for individuals over 21 should contain provisions to ascertain whether the rate of adolescent marijuana use increases, decreases, or remains stable after its passage. A stable funding stream for this research must be secured at the onset.

V. Safety
The issue of prohibiting driving while under the influence of marijuana is technically complicated by the fact that urinary THC levels remain positive far longer that acute impairment. Guidelines for cutoff THC blood levels to determine whether an individual’s impaired driving is due to marijuana intoxication require further definition and clarification. Other safety sensitive professions will also face difficult civil liberty issues for which there are no easy answers in attempting to regulate their workforce. Research to clarify their issues requires funding.

In addition, the AOD Advisory Board recommends support for funding for further professionally-recognized research of the medical benefits of the various components of marijuana so that any new tested pharmaceutical drugs can be properly dispensed by physicians through the current prescription process. We should note that although the state organization of the NAACP supports Proposition 19, the East Contra Costa County Chapter of the NAACP had voted to oppose this ballot measure as explained by Mr. Joseph Adebayo, Chapter President during his presentation to us.

Finally, the Advisory Board is grateful to have had received a wealth of input from such a diverse group of well known, reputable and professionally recognized individuals whose presentations or views greatly contributed to the formulation of this recommendation, including the passionate opinions of the members of the community.

Sincerely,

Mary Lopez, Vice Chair

Attachments
List of Presentations and Material Reviewed
CSAM’s Position

C. Dr. William Walker, Health Services Department Director
Haven Fearn, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Division Director

“The Mission of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board of Contra Costa County is to assess family and community needs regarding prevention and treatment of alcohol and other drug relate problems. We report the finds to the Health Services Department and the Board of Supervisors and we advocate for the communities that we serve”
Letter to the Board of Supervisors Oppose Proposition 19
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4 - Fergusson, Horwood and Beutrais: “Cannabis and educational achievement,” Addiction, 98, 1681-1693, 2003

5 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive – 2007, http://cpsr.umich.edu/SAMHDA/


6 - Schwab Reports, The Need to Invest in Adolescent Treatment, 2004

7 - 2007 Highlights: Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS)

8 - 2007 Highlights: Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS)

List of Presenters Marijuana Legalization Educational Series

Dr. Fred J. Von Stieff, M.D./A.A.F.P. American Board of Addiction Medicine – John Muir Center for Recovery, Medical Director
Mickie Marchetti, Executive Director REACH Project – AOD Adolescent Treatment
Robert J. Kochly, Contra Costa County District Attorney
Lieutenant Dennis Kahane, Contra Costa County Sheriff Department
Richard Lee, President, Oaksterdam University, Proponent of 2010 “Regulate, Control, Tax Cannabis”, Q&A
Kethen Saffier M.D. CCC Health Services Department
Joseph Adebayo, President NAACP East County Chapter
Beau Kilmer, Ph.D. Co-Director, RAND Drug Policy Research Center

Additional Participants

Haven Fearn, Alcohol and Other Drugs Director
Harold Parsley, Contra Costa Anti-Marijuana Initiative Task Force
Various Contra Costa Residents

Material Reviewed

The United Methodist Church
Statement by Steve Cooley, L.A. District Attorney
The Regulate, Control and Tax Cannabis Act of 2010, Analysis by Taxvcannabis.org
Legislative Analyst Office: Changes California Law to Legalize Marijuana and Allow it to be Regulated and Taxed Initiative Statute
The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH Report) January 9, 2004; Marijuana Use and Delinquent Behavior Among Youth
National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Articles