
Public Meeting

of

THE NEW JERSEY LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

“Recreational marijuana hearings; first of three”

LOCATION: Cityline Church
1510 John F. Kennedy Blvd.
Jersey City, New Jersey

DATE: February 21, 2018
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF CAUCUS PRESENT:

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Chair
Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter, 2nd Vice Chair
Senator Sandra B. Cunningham
Senator Nia H. Gill, Esq.
Assemblywoman Angelica M. Jimenez
Assemblywoman Angela V. McKnight



Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Chair): Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SENATOR RICE: My name is Ronald L. Rice; I'm a New Jersey State Senator.

I represent the 20th Legislative District here in New Jersey, but I'm also the Chairman of the New Jersey Black Caucus. (applause) Yes, you can applaud for my caucus. (applause) (laughter)

We do work, and we see things sometimes differently than other folks within the Legislature. And that's why it's important, as a Caucus, that we do evaluate what's happening.

I want to thank all of you who have taken the time to come out this morning to be at the hearing. Some people asked, "How come the hearing is not at night?" One of the reasons that it's not at night is because it's important for the media to get the information and share it with the general public at large. Also, we have a number of guests from out of state who we asked to come in; and they were gracious enough to give up their time to be here.

Before we get started, I want to say that people are going to be walking in and out. We're going to have other members coming in; there are a few press conferences this morning that they are going to be at. I know Senator Cunningham, who is to my right, has to leave shortly, and she's going to try to get back. But it's important.

The one thing that we're doing this morning -- for those who may be following us up and down the state -- we had a commitment, the Legislative Black Caucus, to hold hearings throughout the state to provide

information. We're not here to debate the issue; we're here to provide information to the general public. We've heard all that organizations are saying that are promulgating and promoting the legalization of marijuana -- recreational marijuana; but there are other sides to that, that the public needs to hear as well.

And we do know, as a Black Caucus, what's taking place throughout the State of New Jersey, and in our various districts, without the legalization. We believe that New Jersey residents can make rational and just decisions when they have all the information available to them. So I just wanted to preface my remarks there.

Also, I want to say to those individuals who are activists who are here today -- and I know who you are -- and those who are here to disturb the hearing, I'm asking you not to do that. I don't think you know me well; I don't operate that way. And I have no problem with bad media on my actions; I think that's important to know.

And the reason I'm raising that is because I thought I saw a little confrontation starting to brew with people who disagree. We have guests who have travelled far, at their expense, to be here at our request, to share information; and we want that heard.

So is everybody on the same page with me?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: So here's what we want to do. I want to thank Pastor Rodriguez -- and Assemblywoman McKnight, I'll say more about that -- for having us in his house. And the reason we chose churches for our hearings -- and we choose churches -- is because those of us who are spiritual people recognize this house to be God's house. So what I want

you to do is, I want you to turn to the person next to you, say hello, and greet them with love.

(audience greets one another)

Now, I want you to know-- Now, God's going to bless you for that, okay?

With that being said, we're about to start this hearing. And I want to just introduce to you, for a few words -- and you'll hear more from them later -- Assemblywoman McKnight, who is the Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus Judiciary Committee. And when it comes to issues of this type -- law enforcement, etc., -- coming to two of our Committees. So she has taken the time to work with me, as the Chair, on the planning and the logistics, along with Assemblyman Gordon Johnson -- who will probably be here shortly, who chairs Law and Public Safety; Senator Cunningham; Senator Gill, who is the Senior Advisor to me, as the Chair of the Caucus; Assemblyman Holley has taken lead on the Elizabeth hearing, and the logistics are being planned for that. And also, Assemblywoman Sumter, who is the Vice Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, who will be here shortly as well.

And we hope that today is a fruitful day. We know that the speakers have travelled far, but we have to limit the testimony. And I am hoping that each of the speakers here have written testimony you can leave with us.

We're also being transcribed. I'm going to say that again -- we're being transcribed, so speak into the mikes because it's important that we get good transcripts and good testimony from those who are going to provide us with information.

With that, Senator Cunningham is going to have to leave shortly. And so what I'm going to do is ask Assemblywoman McKnight -- since it's her lead and her Committee -- to bring greetings to you; and then I'm going to ask Senator Cunningham to bring greetings as well.

Assemblywoman McKnight.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Good morning, everyone. How is everyone doing?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE:
(Indiscernible).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: I want to say, first, thank you for coming here today. I know many of you probably need to go to work and do some other things inside the office. But you came here today to hear what our experts will be saying.

I want to say thank you to Pastor Joshua -- can you please stand up Pastor? (applause) -- for inviting us and hosting us today. He and I have been going back and forth, through e-mails, and phone calls, and text messages; and today we are here.

So on behalf of the Legislative Black Caucus, thank you, and to your staff, for your hospitality.

And I want to acknowledge-- Do we have any elected officials who are in here? All right; here we go.

DANA RONE: (off mike) I'm over here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Oh, okay.

MS. RONE: How are you doing? Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Good morning.

So I want to give thanks to all of the elected officials who are here as well.

And just thank you all.

The purpose of this is for us to allow education to happen. Without saying that we are pro or we are con on adult-use marijuana, first we need to know all the logistics. So today is for us to hear from experts; today is for us to take this information and then soak it in so that we can figure out what to do that's for the benefit of New Jersey.

I want to thank Senator Rice for his leadership on this, as well as Senator Cunningham. And we have Senator Gill who is coming down. And today is just a beautiful day. The weather is beautiful and we're all beautiful. So as Senator Rice said, look at your neighbor and say, "Hello."

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Hello.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Say, "I love you."

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: I love you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: And let's be respectful of all our times, and let's get this education so that we can figure out what we need to do for the State of New Jersey.

So thank you.

SENATOR RICE: And thank you.

Senator Cunningham.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

First of all, I have the honor of welcoming all of you to the greatest city in the State of New Jersey. Let's give a round of applause for Jersey City. (applause)

I do want to thank Assemblywoman McKnight and, of course, Senator Rice, for taking the leadership position in this situation and putting together this event today. It is certainly well worth it.

You know, this decision that we finally make in the Senate, and the Governor's decision, will have a greater effect on our young people and on our cities than any other issue we can think of. This is a very important issue; it is not to be taken lightly. It is to be taken seriously and with a great deal of thought.

So sessions such as this are absolutely necessary. It's very easy for everyone to have their own opinion; but let's think about what is best for our State and for our residents. That's the most important thing.

And coming to sessions in which you're giving information, and it is left up to you to make your own decision, is very, very important. You're not going to be persuaded either way. You're going to make that decision based upon the information that you're fortunate enough to receive today.

So I'm going to ask everyone, since we're in church, we're asking God to bless us all as we listen, and listen with an open mind and an open heart.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Senator.

Joining us here, as my Senior Advisor, is Senator Nia Gill, Esq., who is also a constitutional litigator; a criminal justice and Civil Rights attorney.

Senator Gill, welcome; and greet our folks, if you will.

SENATOR GILL: Well, thank you very much; and thank you to your wonderful representatives in the great city of Jersey City.

I'm here to listen, so we can understand where we should go; but to listen to the community, to the experts, to be able to take that information and make some critical analysis as we go forward in this issue.

So I'm here to hear from you; and thank you very much for inviting me. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

And to my right, your left, is Raquel, who is my Chief of Staff, okay? And coming up is -- Assemblywoman McKnight can introduce the young lady who is working with the mikes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: That's Regina; she is my Chief of Staff.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

With that, we're going to start the hearing, because time is of the essence. We're asking folks to try to succinct (*sic*) the testimony. I didn't mean to bring you from out of town to try to short-change you. But we do have quite a few speakers, and I would like to get real good testimony on the record that we can share as we move throughout the state -- gather and share with our other colleagues.

So the first speaker is going to be Mr. Rory Wells, who is the former Prosecutor from Toms River, New Jersey. (applause)

R O R Y J. W E L L S, Esq: Thank you, thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Speak directly into the mikes; you're being transcribed. And give your name, and title, and address or organization -- all that kind of stuff.

MR. WELLS: Yes, sir.

Rory Joseph Wells; I'm a founding partner of GoldmanWells Legal Group. I am a former Assistant Prosecutor in Ocean County; I'm also a former Community Relations Officer for the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office.

I do have some remarks; and then, certainly, if there's time, I would entertain any questions you might have of me.

Thank you to the honorable members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus for convening this important hearing.

It is my privilege to appear here today and provide remarks for your consideration.

I also want to acknowledge our host, Cityline Church; in addition to the dignitaries and community members in attendance.

My family lineage dates back over 130 years in our State of New Jersey; initially in Newark, and then in Belleville, where I was raised. I am not an outside interest. This is the state where I was born, and this is the state where I will die.

I am African American. I served my country as a young officer in the Marine Corps--

SENATOR RICE: *Oorah.*

MR. WELLS: *Semper fi*, sir.

--and I served the citizens of Ocean County and State of New Jersey as an Assistant Prosecutor for nearly 13 years. Anyone who knows me could speak of my deep concern for our citizenry.

My testimony is provided against the legalization of recreational marijuana, retail sales, home grows, and cultivation sites.

The first two states to allow sales of legalized recreational marijuana were Colorado and Washington, in January of 2014. This means the legal recreational industry in this country is just over 48 months old. It is simply impossible to say this is a success with so little time for observation.

Colorado was first to legalize recreational marijuana, and their claims of a financial windfall are indeed great. In the process of chasing the money, however, they have destroyed their brand. When speaking of Colorado, no one mentions their restaurants, skiing, universities, or entertainment. Now when someone hears the words *Denver, Colorado*, anywhere on the planet, they think of one thing.

New Jersey has spent decades promoting the Jersey Shore, our tomatoes, blueberries, and sweet corn; the Jersey City waterfront, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, our museums, the diversity of our food, and so many other great things about our state. Are we prepared to trade this for marijuana tourism and 4/20 celebrations?

The homeless situations in Denver and Seattle have been a growing problem for years. This difficult situation has clearly been exacerbated by migrants coming into the cities to use the drug legally and with dreams of getting in on the market. We must ask ourselves, “Are we prepared to handle an influx of additional homeless people attracted to marijuana sales in Newark, Paterson, Jersey City, or Trenton? Do Atlantic City and Camden have the resources to provide for dozens, if not hundreds, of new homeless migrants living on their streets?”

I’m not here to argue that smoking or ingesting marijuana is the worst drug you can put in your body; it’s not. And people with lots of

resources and those living in gated communities will always make out just fine. I'm arguing that passing recreational use and sales would degrade the quality of life and alter the fabric of our communities in a way we would not be able to reverse.

Who will stand in the gap for the poor and most vulnerable? Are we prepared to surrender on the issue? For the individual already struggling with other drugs, alcohol, lottery scratch-offs, and nicotine, will we now say, "Let's add open marijuana sales to your problems"?

Our goal should be a healthy, sober, prosperous, successful populace. Legalizing a drug that makes you high, slows your response time, makes you less efficient, and affects your memory, runs contrary to that goal. I believe this is a revenue source we should pass on.

There is a large subculture that has grown around the glorification of marijuana. They smoke it, eat it, collect it, write songs, make movies, and create art dedicated to the worship of this plant. It breaks my heart that this is also evidenced in large parts of our African American and hip hop communities. We should continue to focus on academic scholarship, athletic excellence, and commitment in our relationships and the parenting our children. Forgive me for not celebrating when I am told the answer is more drugs and fewer consequences for that drug.

Let us watch and learn from the mistakes of other states before rushing into this generational decision that would nearly be impossible to reverse.

And if I could just add, I'm very concerned about the homeless aspect. I don't know if there's been definitive studies how homelessness has

affected those states -- not necessarily the rural states -- but here in New Jersey, we don't know what New York and Pennsylvania are considering. So if we were to initiate this legislation, we would clearly have migrants coming from New York and Pennsylvania to either experiment, utilize, purchase these drugs; they may stay, they may not. But it is my opinion that certainly we would increase our homelessness problem here in New Jersey.

That's my testimony offered for the Committee, and I thank you for listening.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Any members have any questions for this speaker? (no response) Thank you very much.

MR. WELLS: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: The next person we're going to hear from is Bishop Jethro James.

Bishop.

BISHOP JETHRO C. JAMES, Jr.: Thank you for having me.

Good morning, and God bless all of you.

I come today because--

SENATOR RICE: Bishop, would you cite your name and who you represent, in terms--

BISHOP JAMES: Yes, sir.

I'm Bishop Jethro James; I'm President of the Newark-North Jersey Committee of Black Churchmen, as well as the Senior Pastor of the Paradise Church. And I am the Bishop who is responsible for all social

action of all the Full Gospel churches in the State of New Jersey, along with a Chaplain for the New Jersey State Police. And so I have a few titles, Senator.

Thank you, once again, for having me.

I've come this morning to warn us about the dangers of trying to pass a legislation that makes empty promises.

The first thing I'd like to say is that it will devastate communities of color; number one. Those of us who were fortunate enough to get an education and work at corporate-- I retired from PSE&G, an urban development executive, after 38 years of services. We know that those who would seek employment would never work for the State of New Jersey as a professional; you can't teach school in the State of New Jersey; you certainly won't be driving any of the Transit things; you will not be working in the prison system; you will not work for any major corporation. Even now, in this state, Home Depot, as well as Lowes, requires a drug test as a condition of employment. No legislation will change that.

The reality is that if unemployment in Parsippany -- which is only 25 minutes up 280 from Newark -- is 5 percent in their community, it's 15 percent in Newark. The reality is that our best and our brightest brains will be fried by the time they get a chance to be employed.

The other thing is that I met with certain hospital presidents, and we've talked about it from a healthcare perspective. We know that for a hundred years, alcohol and tobacco were pushed in our neighborhood, as well as all over the country. It became a billion, maybe even a trillion-dollar industry. The reality is now it's a billion-dollar industry to stop you from smoking cigarettes because of what it does. The American Medical

Association, in its recent *Journal of the American Medical Association*, talks about what cannabis will do to your lungs, as well as your heart. It talks about what it will do to your brain. We know that they're saying that cannabis is wonderful for a woman in her first trimester; that it will stop her from her morning sickness. However, they don't know what damage it will do to the fetus; as well if she continues to smoke, it will also be in her breast milk.

In this state, we know that we're seeing major problems with our young folks who come in on the weekend. I do sit on the Board of Saint Michael's Hospital in Newark. We had 29 incidents of young folks who, literally, were out of their minds, coming through the emergency room, in two days.

We are looking at what it does in Denver; and folks don't want to talk about this, but in Denver we're seeing that there is a rise in juveniles being arrested because, even in this state, or any state that has the laws, juveniles cannot purchase or possess it because of the -- I call it the *side products*: the candies, the ice cream, the cookies, and the other marijuana-derivative products juveniles as young as 11 are being arrested for.

They're talking about, on the other side, about folks not going to jail. But if you're locked up at 11 years old, or have a juvenile record, it's going to cause your parents a problem. The reality in Denver for juveniles in the African American community -- a 55 percent increase of 11- to 16-year-olds arrested possessing cannabis. In Hispanic communities, 34 percent arrested. In the white community, 8 percent; it went down, and I'm wondering why. When we look at Denver, Colorado -- these are facts -- that cannabis shops, or *smoke shops*, as they're called, are put predominantly

in African American and poor communities-- There are more smoke shops in Denver than there are Starbucks or McDonalds.

When you look at the geo mapping, you will find out that even in this state, already we have two counties that have said there will be no smoke shops. They are Ocean County and Monmouth County; so even our Governor, who is pushing this, can't buy cannabis in his own county. The reality is it will devastate the African American community. It will devastate any chance of our children having a future.

And then when it comes down to the health care, we're finding out that if all of us would have a drink, it only impacts our minds; it will impact our bodies if we're all smoking cannabis, my grandchildren, or your children, or grandchildren (indiscernible). We're finding out that, in Denver, there is-- From 0 to 7, there is a 70 percent increase in the poison hotline because we know that babies who will be exposed to this smoke, trying to develop their lungs, their hearts, and their other organs. And so there is no *EpiPen* for cannabis. We need to think long and hard about the long-lasting effects that it's going to have on our community.

Thank you so much for hearing me; and God bless all of you.

Are there any questions?

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Bishop, for taking the time to come out.

Just continue to pray for New Jersey and its residents, and pray for the Legislature to make the right decisions.

Anyone have any questions for the Bishop? (no response)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: No.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: No.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; Bishop, do you have written testimony?

BISHOP JAMES: No, I didn't bring it in writing.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

BISHOP JAMES: But I'll forward it to you, sir.

SENATOR RICE: All right; thank you.

BISHOP JAMES: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: The last speaker-- Rory, did you have written testimony?

MR. WELLS: (off mike) I did provide my testimony; yes, sir.

SENATOR RICE: Okay, thank you very much.

Okay; and I'm just going to ask that, since we don't have copies, would you make copies and get them all back to us so I can share it with my members?

Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF COMMITTEE: I have copies, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; you have additional copies for everybody? Okay, good.

All right, so the next speaker we're going to have is Kristina Ziobro, who is a parent; okay.

K R I S T I N A Z I O B R O: Hi, there.

Can you hear me?

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

MS. ZIOBRO: My name is Kristina Ziobro. I am a mother, wife, daughter, and businesswoman; born and raised in New Jersey.

Thank you for inviting me here today and giving me, my husband--

SENATOR RICE: Take your time.

MS. ZIOBRO: --sorry -- and my son Michael a voice.

This is my story.

I'm sorry.

"Wake up, Michael; wake up," were the words I spoke to my son the evening of April 10, when I went to say good night to him and instead found him lying on the floor, unresponsive and not moving.

From that second on, that evening was a blur. I immediately knew something was wrong; very, very wrong. I ran to get my husband and called 911. We started CPR and waited for the EMTs to arrive. Neighbors, firemen, policemen, and EMTs all showed up, but no one could save Michael. He was gone.

We would eventually know why: it was arrhythmia, induced by cannabis with 28 percent THC. THC refers to a psychotropic cannabinoid, and is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis that caused Michael's death.

Because of this, I am compelled to raise awareness of the considerable risks and implications of smoking marijuana, because I don't believe the public is aware of these dangers. I feel, in my heart of hearts, if Michael knew the full implications of smoking marijuana with high levels of THC he would be alive today.

I knew Michael smoked pot. It was the only thing -- after years and years of going to doctors, specialists, and psychologists -- that relieved his IBS, irritable bowel syndrome, with which he suffered painfully for quite

a while. My husband and I did not approve; but after years of seeing Michael in agony, we acquiesced to it because, for the first time in ages, Michael was pain-free and happy. And as a parent, isn't that what we all want for our children?

As time went by, Michael smoked more, maybe once a day, and became not only an advocate of marijuana use, but an evangelist. He researched and studied the history, politics, and effects on the body and mind, ad nauseam. He believed, because of what he read in articles, research, and media, using pot was safe; it was natural; a general panacea for many, if not all, ills. At one point, he almost had me and my husband convinced of it, too, so we decided to let it go.

But somehow Michael got his hands on medical marijuana with 24 percent and 28 percent THC. Why that level is required, or even produced, is beyond me; but I suppose Michael thought the higher the THC level, the less he had to consume to relieve his pain. If he had only been aware of and known to dig a bit deeper, he would have found studies and research that substantiates how elevated THC levels in marijuana can cause harm, even death. Then he might have recognized that his racing heart, when he smoked, was not normal. If he knew all this, he'd be alive today, and our hearts would not be broken.

Today more than ever there is such a push to legalize and legitimize marijuana, and my fear is this is being done without all the data being thoroughly vetted and explored -- data and facts on the effects of marijuana on the mind, body, and soul. I am going public with Michael's story to implore the powers that be to do their homework and broadcast the pros and cons of marijuana use. I'm going public to raise awareness to

prevent another mother from ever having to try and wake her child and not being able to ever again.

So why am I here today? I never had an agenda on the legalization of marijuana before Michael died. I was neutral; I was naive, like most people I think are. But no more. Now we know today's marijuana has a higher potency; it comes in all sorts forms that everyone's talked about today: gummies, brownies, lollipops, soda, you name it -- up to THC levels of 90 percent. Again, the pot Michael smoked was 28 percent.

Now, I know legalizing and commercializing marijuana will create the next Big Tobacco industry of our time -- a new industry of lobbyists and special interests, intending to put profits and special interests over public health and safety regulations.

Now, we know in states that have legal marijuana, the black market continues to thrive. Youth drug use is increasing, state budget shortfalls continue, and the number of fatal drugged car crashes is skyrocketing.

And now I know people are dying and lives are being destroyed because of marijuana, legal or not, prescribed or not. That's why I've gone public with Michael's story. I don't want another mother, father, sister, brother, grandfather to go through what we're going through.

I am also proud to be a part of SAM -- Smart Approaches to Marijuana -- and NJ RAMP. Their mission is one I'm in full alignment with; their mission being to envision a society where marijuana policies are aligned with a scientific understanding of marijuana's harms, and the commercialization and normalization of marijuana are no more; a mission to educate citizens on the science of marijuana and to promote health first,

smart policies, and attitudes that decrease marijuana use and its consequences.

Consequences -- they've been pretty high for me and my family. This is why I'm here today, and why I am imploring you not to legalize marijuana here in New Jersey, or anywhere.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, also.

Let me say to you, because you're a parent, that, the members of the Legislative Black Caucus -- we do understand that aspect of this debate, if you will.

I also want to say to those of you who are here that since this debate started several years ago throughout the country, it's always been said that the issue is not money; the issue is social justice. But it's being sold on the backs of black folks and brown people. The conversation is that there are more black people in jail for the abuse or possession of marijuana than "whites," and that the money part is something that is secondary to the real issue of social justice.

And so we understand what is being said; we also understand that the argument is that if, in fact, we legalize marijuana, that black folks -- who are in jail three times more than white folks -- will be able to come out and get their records expunged. Well, it seems to me that those who are three times less in jail with the same convictions should be let out as well; and I suspect that would happen.

But if it's about social justice and not money, then there are alternative ways to accomplish that.

And so we're going to see where this is going. But if you have written testimony, if you could leave a copy over there (indicates), we'd appreciate it, because we need all this information, once again, shared with our colleagues in Trenton so they can make just decisions. Because most of my colleagues are not going to do anything but listen to what other colleagues say, and special interest groups say -- whether it's groups from outside, groups from inside. They're not going to do their own in-depth research, as some of us have done already. And so it's important that we have your personal testimony.

Thank you very much.

MS. ZIOBRO: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: The next speaker-- Did you have a question?

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Is this the one? (referring to PA microphone) Okay.

First of all, I want to thank you for sharing your story. I can see how painful this is for you, obviously.

But I wanted to ask you -- did Michael have a prescription for the medical marijuana that he was using?

MS. ZIOBRO: No; he bought it illegally on the streets.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Okay; thank you.

SENATOR RICE: And see-- And I just want to indicate -- that's where the debate is. People will say that the polls show that the majority of people support the legalization of marijuana. And those of us who have an academic background understand how polls work, and how you set the propositions up -- recognize that perhaps the right questions

weren't asked. And if you ask someone who has pain, and really needs some medical help, if they support the legalization of marijuana, and you say nothing more, they're going to assume that you're talking about the legalization of medical marijuana. And they're going to say "yes." If you ask someone who is just, like, walking down the street and being happy off marijuana, nothing else to do with their time; or someone who just likes to do it like someone likes to drink a beer, they are going to say "yes." So that's 200 percent. But when you frame the question differently, and qualify it to make it very clear, "Do you support the legalization of recreational marijuana?" and actually identify what that means -- with stores in communities like Jersey City, Newark, other places, etc. -- you're going to get a different response from a lot of people who support the medical marijuana.

And so when the questions were framed differently -- by Farleigh Dickinson University, by SAM, and other people throughout the country -- it came down to 50-50 in New Jersey. In fact, it came where the majority of the people do not support the legalization of recreational marijuana. But there's reasonably strong support for medical marijuana. And I think that medical marijuana, under the right conditions, can be helpful to those, etc. The research is still out as to the impact; but we do know there are side effects to medical marijuana. But we also know there are side effects to pain pills; and what your doctor would do is tell you, "Okay, we're going to cut back and take you off them, and put you on something else."

We also know that that's controlled through drugstore -- prescription drugs; and so we have a lot for the control. And I think it was

right for the Governor not to be pushed to move too fast on the rec stuff, even though a lot of money people are promulgating, and using his name, saying he's going to get it done -- to have study on medical. Medical is legal in New Jersey. The reason that some members of the Legislative Black Caucus -- me being one of them -- did not support the bill for medical marijuana when it came up is because I knew nobody would get any help. And no one listens to us, as a Caucus and individually. The same thing happened with bail reform; you know, no one listened, and then they said that we're out of money. But we told them before what the situation would be.

So we're having this on our volition because we want to share information with you. And I think if medical is done correctly -- and that's what we should be fixing -- then you wouldn't have had to worry about-- You know, if it was necessary for you to have the medical, he wouldn't have gotten it illegally without legalization of storefronts.

So I want to thank you once again.

MR. ZIBRIO: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Next, we're going to call up, to speak before us, Mr. Virgil Grant.

And while he's coming up, I want to thank Mr. Grant because I know that he's had conversations with Assemblywoman McKnight, and he's travelled a real long distance. I hope that wasn't the red-eye but, you know, we're just happy to see you anyway. (laughter)

VIRGIL GRANT III: There you go, Senator; thank you.

Good morning; my name is Virgil Grant. I am a co-founder of California Minority Alliance; also President of the Southern California

Coalition. These two organizations led the legalization of cannabis in California, medical as well as adult-use.

I've been in the industry since the very beginning. I have one of the oldest shops in the history of medical marijuana in the City of Los Angeles; 22 years we've had medical marijuana, long before Denver, Seattle, and Oregon was ever thought of.

We have just turned into adult-use recently, in 2018; I will say that through my 20-plus years in the cannabis industry, I am considered an expert.

I passed Proposition M in the City of Los Angeles, with the social equity component; which was very important to me, as an African American male.

We cannot have the conversation about legalization without talking about social equity, social justice, social reform. It is our civic responsibility to address these issues when we talk about legalization. Decriminalization does not go far enough. It still is a crime; people are still being locked up. I think the gentleman prior to me gave statistics about people still being locked up in Denver because of the decrim laws. When you legalize something, that's it; you legalize it. There is no criminality in it. When you *decrim* something, it's still on the books as a law. And as the Senator said, we are three time more likely to be arrested for the same crime than our white counterparts who are doing at a rate more than we are. That's statistically true. And I'll just go through some statistics from the ACLU and the NAACP; and by the way, I am a member of the California Black Caucus.

So the laws -- the high arrest rates and incarceration rates for these communities are not reflective of increased prevalence of drug use; but rather law enforcement focus on urban areas, low-income communities, and communities of people of color. Disparities in arrests and incarcerations are seen for both drug possession law violations as well as low-level sales. Those selling small amounts of drugs to support their own drug use may go into jail for decades. This unequal enforcement ignores the universality of drug dependency, as well as the universal appeal of drugs themselves.

It becomes clear that mass criminalization of people of color are particularly young African American males. It is as profound a system of racial control as the Jim Crow laws were in this country in the mid-1960s. And I'll give this report over; it has a whole host -- that I won't read -- of statistics regarding mass incarcerations, small drug possessions, small drug use.

What we did in California -- and I'll go over some of the things that I heard in other testimonies that I really like, because I do support the three people who spoke in areas prior to me; but let's just address homelessness. Homelessness in California -- with us having the medical marijuana industry and now adult-use -- has gone down because of the revenues received from the cannabis industry; not gone up, but gone down. We are a tourist state; one of the largest tourist states in the country as well, and we have not had an increase of homelessness. I don't know what Denver's issue is with their homelessness, but we attack our homelessness aggressively.

There is no such thing as a drug-free city; because if there was a drug-free city, then we wouldn't have had the failed war on drugs. So let's

be clear about that. When people say that they want a drug-free city, I think we really need to think about what that looks like. I've had this conversation many times, "Well, we have a drug-free city," but that's the same city that has marijuana sales -- illegally; that has cocaine sales, meth sales -- illegally. There is no such thing. So the failed war on drugs -- it just didn't work. We have to address it from another angle and another issue.

And I'm glad that the Senator asked the question to the young lady who was here prior, "How did he obtain his cannabis?" Because I was concerned that a shop owner would not educate the consumer about the use of cannabis if they've used it before. If someone comes into my shop and purchases cannabis, we give them an extensive interview about their cannabis use, and are they a new user, or are they users who have been using prior to, so that we can educate them. We would never give them high levels of THC if they never used cannabis before. That would be just like a doctor giving me something -- a Vicodin or something for just an over the counter pain issue.

So we're very educated. Education, to me, is one of the most important things within this industry. I kind of felt like I was in a *Reefer Madness* zone, sitting back there, a minute ago, with all of the (applause) -- with all of the untruths that I heard. You guys need to educate yourselves first, on this platform, before any decisions are made. We had 22 years of successes and failures in California before we decided to accept the legalization of adult-use. We don't say *recreational*; because when you say *recreational*, you think of parks, play, children, fun. (applause) That's not where it's at. It's adult-use. And when you say *adult-use*, you take children

out of the conversation; because we do not want our children consuming cannabis. (applause)

I have five daughters; none of them consume cannabis because of the educational platform. Now, they've tried it; yes. But they were adults when they tried it, because they had their father there to give them that education. I think the biggest key is education, education, education. That's for the people who say "no," as well as the people who say "yes." That's for the consumer, the non-consumer; that's for our children in schools to understand why you don't partake in this until you're an adult, you're responsible, and able to make right decisions for yourself. The same as alcohol; 21 years and above. You don't drink as a minor, and you shouldn't. We do not promote that, and we stand by adult-use.

There are just a couple of more things that I'd like to speak on.

The establishment of a social equity program. Like I said, if we're going to talk about legalization, we have to go back to the conversation of how we were incarcerated for this same plant; and why we were incarcerated. Moving forward, if this is going to be an industry that we are going to allow, then we need to make sure that there is fair and equitable participation in the cannabis industry among all. In L.A., in the very beginning, before we implemented social equity, this was an all-white, male-run industry. No people of color participated, but we were the first ones to get locked up in prison.

I myself did six years in Federal prison for owning and operating a legal and legitimate medical marijuana facility under the Bush Administration. Let me just explain to you the devastation it did to my five daughters, who didn't have a father in the home for six years. I missed

three graduations, three proms -- I'll never get that back -- for doing the same thing that my white counterpart was still out on the streets doing, in the same manner that I was.

So when we talk about moving forward, let's make sure that we address those issues. When we talk about legalization and we begin to bring this program in the fold, let's make sure that there's fair and equitable participation among all.

I hold a whole host of knowledge within myself that I've given to the state of California. We're implementing a social equity program even with this state, as we speak. I'm speaking directly with Governor Brown on how many set-aside licenses we are going to do within the state of California on the state level. In the city of Los Angeles, just like Oakland, we made sure that we have a social equity program that reflects the people that they operate in. I agree with the gentleman -- in Denver, they came to speak to the L.A. City Council. And my question was, why are all the grows and the shops in minority communities, but there is only one owner, Wanda James, who owns a medical marijuana facility -- in their state it's *recreational* -- facility in Denver? They're in our neighborhoods, but we don't have ownership? Because one thing we're not about to do is just be workers; we're going to be owners and operators. This is a billion-dollar industry-- (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Hold it down.

MR. GRANT: --soon to be a trillion-dollar industry. And the Bishop back there talked about our future. Our future of our children, owning and operating in a billion-dollar industry-- He also spoke about-- (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Hold it down--

MR. GRANT: --you can't get a job because you smoked cannabis.

SENATOR RICE: --we're recording.

MR. GRANT: Well, come work for me. I pay \$20.50 an hour. That's the average pay for a cultivator with no education within the industry; \$20.50 an hour. And you can consume cannabis because I'm not going to drug-test you. (laughter)

And we have other components within the cannabis industry that will hire people. Now, I'm not saying what he's saying is not correct. Yes, if you want a civic job, and that's the direction that you want to go in, then you need to not consume cannabis. Be responsible; I support that. But if you want to come into this industry, which we've been around-- And it's going to be growing. New Jersey may not say "yes" today; may not say "yes" tomorrow. But you can best believe it's going to come, and it's going to come throughout the country, just as it has in California. If you look at the map that I will hand over, over 30-something states have some form of legalization. That's over half the country -- has already said "yes" on this. It's not going back. The question is, how do you want it to look in your town, if it's here? If it's here, how do you want to regulate it? If it's here, how do you want to control it, how do you want to educate your community? These are the conversations you need to have; not the conversations about we don't want it, because that's not a reality. That's not a true reality. There are a few who don't want it, but the overwhelming majority do. When you bring it here, bring it responsibly; make sure it makes sense to your community.

Thank you; I appreciate it. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you as well.

Hey, hold up; okay. We're going to-- Okay, I'm going to ask you--

I'm going to say this again. You know, respectfully, we're recording; so please don't applaud, either side, whatever the conversation is. We're recording. If you can't do that, I would ask you to respectfully respect us -- you're still in church -- and excuse yourself. Take the information; you don't have to agree with it, or you can agree with it, okay?

And I want to thank you, Mr. Grant, for your testimony. And I can say this. Whatever is coming, maybe it should come where -- at the Federal level as regulators, so that we don't have these debates. Because when you go city by city -- our demographics are different than Colorado and places like that; probably closer aligned with Oakland, in terms of some our cities. But the reality is that we're a very tight state, and things are a little bit different here. And people are trying to weight it too, and they can't really do that if they know anything about how to measure our things, okay?

Our colleagues have been selling this -- like other folks have been selling it -- not with our conversation. They have been selling it with the fact that it's a social justice issue; which it is -- that black folks would be freed. So now you understand that, as a black man, our history of slavery and taking the chains off. So what folks are saying to us in New Jersey is that there are more black people in jail, and you shouldn't be in jail. And we've been saying -- we've been telling you that for a long time. So now you agree with us, "Yes, we do, and we want to get you out of jail." "Thank

you; then turn us loose.” “Well, we can’t turn you loose.” “Why can you not turn us loose?” “Well, we can turn you loose if you sign this legalization bill.” “Well, if you said we shouldn’t be in jail, I shouldn’t have to sign anything.”

So it’s a social justice issue; I can address the social justice issue by way of decriminalization. And I recognize that decriminalization, number one, doesn’t put you back in jail. Even though it’s still illegal, you get fines and penalties, but you can have personal use. But if you legalize it, there’s still a line where it becomes illegal. You know, you just can’t transport a million dollars’ worth of drugs, okay?

So either way you’re going to have this whole concept of folks being arrested in disproportionate numbers; and we get that. But for someone to say that, “We will only let you out of jail if you sign a legalization bill” then I’m saying, “You’re holding me hostage.” Now, if you understand *plantation mentality*, that’s *plantation mentality*. If you understand the war on drugs -- and I can give a whole lecture on the war on drugs, even before Ron Reagan in 1982 -- this is a Jim Crow law, the way it’s being presented to us.

I can show you, in New Jersey, where the sponsor came back with a legalization bill and said that this is about social justice. And meanwhile, when he was getting interviewed, when they asked him about expungement, the sponsor said, “Well, maybe that should be a separate bill. I have to think about that. It depends on what degree.” Now, members of the Legislative Black Caucus -- we’ve rode this horse before, when it comes to our communities. When you talk about the number of students at universities, in Colorado and elsewhere, we have college towns here where

there's increased use -- people never use it? Well, the fact of the matter is that our cities are so tight that when you come five blocks in South Orange, New Jersey, to the City of Newark, I can guarantee you if South Orange doesn't want these little shops out there and Newark has them, when they come in front of my office -- God forbid, but it's going to happen; we know for a fact -- somebody is going to get killed or a violent crime is going to take place for the money. They're going to say it's racial.

If Newark does not want it, and you go five blocks to South Orange where Seton Hall University is, then the police are going to stopping our folks. And with this Legislative Black Caucus-- Under the leadership of Joe Charles, former Justice, who led the fight on racial profiling in the state -- and they're going to claim it's racial profiling, when it's not; it's police checking people because of the influx of traffic.

And so we have some issues here that have not been addressed. There's information that our people is not being given, based on what we know now; and that's why we're having these hearings.

If in fact there was a bill passed, we are not going to sit back and say, "We're not going to participate." But in New Jersey, there needs not be a legalization bill passed, so we don't have to get to that point of question. But that's up to the folks. In our state -- unlike the other states -- they don't want to do a referendum. They don't want the people to decide, because the conversation-- If we put it on referendum, the people of New Jersey are going to vote it down. Now, they are probably right, because the latest polls said that most of New Jersey don't want it, unlike the rest of the country, or wherever the polls are that other people are doing. And so if the

majority of the people, if we put out a referendum, don't want it, then why would we do it? Just questions we're raising in our own minds.

And so I just want to share that with you, because as you move across the country speaking and getting invites, look at the demographics and do a little bit more on what has taken place in those particular states and municipalities, and see those slight, thin-line differences.

And so we're looking at it, and that's why we want all the information; and we hear you loud and clear.

If you could leave a copy of your testimony, if you will, with the table.

And Assemblywoman McKnight has a question for you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: And Senator Gill.

SENATOR RICE: And Senator Gill; okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Do you think the school-to-prison pipeline will increase or decrease with the passage of adult-use marijuana, and why?

MR. GRANT: I think it would decrease, due to the fact that it takes it -- once you legalize something, and put it in a controlled market and you take it out of the hands of the criminal element like we have in the City of Los Angeles-- And so it has decreased illegal sales of cannabis on the streets where we now have it in controlled environments. So it has decreased that. Plus we are putting education back into the schools so that we can educate our youth on why not to entertain, or consume, at a rate under 21.

SENATOR RICE: Senator Gill.

SENATOR GILL: I'm very interested-- I represent Montclair; I live in Montclair. And so we have the first medical marijuana; one of the first in the state. Actually, it was three doors down from my Legislative Office, so--

I would really like to know some more specifics about your social equity component -- the areas that you were able to either establish or explore as a social equity component.

MR. GRANT: So what we've done is a (indiscernible) report on social equity. We identified the areas that were heavily impacted by the failed war on drugs -- high arrest rates, things of that nature -- to determine what were the areas that were impacted the most. And so what we did is -- people who came from those communities were able to apply within the social equity program. It gave them, in a sense, a *priority status* to apply for a license within the social equity program. Our thing was about making sure that we weren't just workers within the industry, but owners and operators as well in, like I said, an all predominantly white, male-run industry.

Once we identified that, we made three tiers: one, those people who had been arrested for marijuana drug offenses, non-violent drug offenses, marijuana crimes, were able to apply within the social equity first tier. Second tier -- those who live in those impact zones. And I can also forward you this full report--

SENATOR GILL: Please do.

MR. GRANT: --with how our tiers are structured within the City of Los Angeles, and put you in direct communication with our Commissioner, Cat Packer. And then the third tier was the impact zones.

The fourth tier were those who wanted to open up a business, but invest in the social equity. So someone who wants to apply in the first and second tier, but didn't have the financial wherewithal, and someone wanted to come in and invest in that person and say, "I'm going to invest in this individual to open up a shop," and they would own a percentage within that -- would be in the third tier. Because we know that finances is also something that we had to address within the minority community.

SENATOR GILL: So the social equity component -- did it focus primarily on the entrepreneurial aspect--

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: --as opposed-- Okay.

MR. GRANT: Yes; it focused, mainly and directly, on ownership. Also, as an organization, we also do the educational platform. So we are the educational platform for the industry. We also created -- we have here, with two of our representatives from the New Jersey Minority Alliance, and they have all of the information. And they will be doing the same educational platform that we did in L.A. So we'll be just pushing a lot of information data and things that they can use to educate and help the community.

SENATOR GILL: How were you able to survive the constitutional challenge -- maybe it wasn't challenged -- for set-aside? You indicated in your testimony something about set-aside?

MR. GRANT: Yes. So within the statistical data that we have from the NAACP and the ACLU, and other data within the communities from districts that -- how it was set up in L.A. and City Districts, we took data from all of those components to find out what the arrests rates were,

what the incarceration rates were of people of color within the community. We use that to compile the information that we needed to create what we have -- the model that we have in the City of Los Angeles.

SENATOR GILL: Do you have set-asides?

MR. GRANT: I mean set-asides; I'm sorry. Yes, set-asides are on the state level. In L.A. we have-- And I don't know if I would call it *set-asides*.

SENATOR GILL: Let's call the one set-aside -- that's set-aside, because-- For the state, right?

MR. GRANT: For the state, we're talking about set-asides.

SENATOR GILL: Let's talk about-- Okay.

MR. GRANT: Okay.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: So on the state level, with the data that we've given to the Governor, we're asking for no less than 25 percent of the licenses to be set aside for the minority community.

SENATOR GILL: Has that been challenged, as a set-aside proposition?

MR. GRANT: No; it hasn't been challenged as of right now.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: So--

SENATOR GILL: So it hasn't actually taken place. This is something that you're either discussing or in negotiations--

MR. GRANT: This is still in the conversation.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: But as far as L.A. is concerned, it is--

SENATOR GILL: Well, since I'm-- And the reason I focus on the state is because we have to make the determination from a statewide level.

MR. GRANT: Okay; I see.

SENATOR GILL: And so I don't mean to cut you off--

MR. GRANT: Yes; no, no, no. I get it.

SENATOR GILL: --in that sense.

MR. GRANT: I get it.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

Has there been any particular attention given to the social justice aspect, in terms of incarceration of younger children, with respect-- Let me back up on that. In the law that's before us, you're not going to be allowed to use marijuana, in any form, in any government housing. It is illegal, or will be illegal, of course, to use marijuana in public. So that the use of marijuana, if you -- since it is legal and you want to use it, but you can't use it in the projects, it then will push the usage--

MR. GRANT: Into the streets.

SENATOR GILL: --on the street.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: And though it will be illegal, and therefore--

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: Right?

MR. GRANT: We've had that conversation; yes.

SENATOR GILL: The arrest rate and the incarceration rate--

MR. GRANT: Absolutely.

SENATOR GILL: --then still reflects a disproportionate number of black and brown people, simply based on where they are housed-

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MR. GRANT: Exactly.

SENATOR GILL: --and how they're housed.

So how have you dealt with that; or have you been able to deal with it?

MR. GRANT: Yes, of course; we had to have that conversation because the same in California is the same here in New Jersey.

If you are in public housing and you're consuming, you're will be kicked out of your public housing. There are certain places that you rent -- you cannot consume inside your own place that you are renting. And so it does push people into the streets; it pushes people into the parks or public places, which it is illegal for public consumption.

SENATOR GILL: Yes.

MR. GRANT: So we've addressed that with *lounges*. We've addressed that with designated lounges, almost like cigar lounges or places that we have where you can consume in.

SENATOR GILL: So would those lounges in places -- be predominantly in black and brown neighborhoods, since predominantly black and brown people may live in the projects?

MR. GRANT: So let me just give you the history of, at least California -- L.A.

All of the shops were all in the white area at first. I was the first one to bring one to my community, because I felt I wanted to keep the money in our community. So I was the first one to open up in a black area;

but all of the shops were in the white area. So it's a little different in California.

Now, we are trying to make sure that it's not just all-white ownership; but that there is ownership of people of color within this billion-dollar industry. So we are now making sure that there's fair and equitable participation with people of color; because it was, at once -- we weren't allowed to be involved.

SENATOR GILL: And I think -- and just to close; and thank you for your information -- there are actually two realities that are conflated as if they are one. Because it's the reality of the Federal laws that make it illegal that come against the State laws; but the State laws, of course, as we know, cannot override the Federal jurisdiction.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: So you have -- I've been -- seem to be approaching, trying to find-- You have this tension between the two, with respect to enforcement. And even though there are the wonderful intentions to include everyone, there is that other Federal that requires -- I think as a result of the operation -- it focuses the punitive aspect on black and brown communities.

MR. GRANT: Yes ma'am. I myself was a product of that, so I understand that very well.

SENATOR GILL: And so we have to have, I think, a-- And that's why I think it's excellent, your social context part -- we have to have a conversation in New Jersey, because it's not-- Thank you for coming but, you know, at the end of the day, you say it's what your community wants. And I think it's excellent -- your social context part. We have to be able to

honestly say, after we've done our analysis, if we do this, this will happen. Because even though we can control our State legislative reaction and platform, we cannot control the Federal.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: And by not controlling the Federal, is where the punitive aspect of how it will affect brown and black in other communities.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: So, you know, I'm a grandmother; I am very, kind of, focused on what happens. Not-- Because you have the best of intent; that is clear. But what happens as a result of the operation of this dual kind of jurisdiction, one of which I don't have any control over? So--

MR. GRANT: I'd like to speak to that just briefly.

What we've done in California is put a couple of bills into place; layered bills. We have AB-1578; this is a layered bill which allows -- which doesn't allow the Federal government to communicate with the local law enforcement. And I'm sure there are few law enforcers here who would understand what I'm talking about. In order for the DEA or the Feds to come into your town, they have to communicate and get intel from the local jurisdiction, because they don't know what the terrain is like within this city, versus this city, versus that city. So there has to be some communication. And then they have to go to a judge, get a subpoena, get this and that.

Well, we've cut that off in California. There is no communication between the Federal government and the local jurisdiction, and cities and states -- I mean, in our state that has the legalization of

cannabis. We've cut that off. So that is a bill that protects us from the Federal government coming in and creating that conflict of law, where they come in and raid.

So if you've noticed, since we have legalized -- as well as Denver has legalized, and Washington and Oregon -- there has been no Federal intervention. Also, the Rohrabacher and Dana (*sic*) Bill that has come out -- that is also the CJS Amendment -- that defunds the Federal government from interfering with any state that has legalization of cannabis within their state. So there are things--

SENATOR GILL: Is that medical? It's only medical; that one is just medical.

MR. GRANT: Yes, that's -- yes, that's only medical.

SENATOR GILL: Okay, so we put the medical -- which is two doors down from my Legislative Office -- we're going to put that in a different category.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: But the AB-1578 works for legalization across the board--

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: --medical or adult-use. And that's what we put in place to protect the citizens of California.

SENATOR GILL: But the Feds can still come in.

MR. GRANT: The Feds can--

SENATOR GILL: They can talk to the local police -- or not?

MR. GRANT: No, they cannot.

SENATOR GILL: No; but I mean even if they don't talk to the local police, that does not -- that's not a bar to the Feds coming in. That's a process that's not a--

MR. GRANT: It's a process that they would have to go through.

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: And to be honest with you, I don't really know enough about the Federal government--

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: --in reference to them being able to step over our laws. But I know they do have to have the okay of the Governor.

SENATOR GILL: Okay; this is the last one, and thank you very much. And I'll look at your--

Part of the community thinks that New Jersey may be in a more particular position because Trump lives here, or hides out here; whatever you want to call it. (laughter) I call it *hiding out*, because he is not actually a citizen of this state. So that -- and this is not your issue -- New Jersey may be in a different position. And so we just have to be able to have a -- address that--

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: --in a meaningful way, upfront. And that's not your issue.

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: But thank you; and I look forward to reading your information.

MR. GRANT: Thank you.

SENATOR GILL: And thank you very much.

MR. GRANT: Yes, Trump hates California; so I figure if he attacks, he'll attack first in California. (laughter)

SENATOR GILL: Well, you know, it's much easier just to roll down the road from where you live in Jersey, you know?

So thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: I'm going to let you go, and I know that you're beyond the time we allocated. But I think it was important that we ask you a couple of questions, okay?

MR. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Number one -- and I certainly concur with everything Senator Gill said, and that leads to a lot of other questions to be answered too, as you can see, and you can also start to see a difference between New Jersey and California. And California does pretty much everything by referendum. And the unfortunate thing about California -- and I go back over 30-plus years working with California legislators in different capacities, from city councils down -- is that when you do things, you really can't change them when they're bad. Proposition 13 -- you can never change as much as they want to. And so any problems that California is going to have with marijuana -- whether it's medical or recreational -- more than likely is not going to be able to get fixed. They are going to do things to make it worse, trying to clean it up.

But my question to you is, there is still, on the business side-- What people are projecting to New Jersey residents is that everybody is going to have all these jobs, and everybody is going to go into business. And the reality is that black and brown folks, and culturally disadvantaged

whites -- I mean poor whites, okay? -- and others cannot even get small loans now for personal needs; can't get mortgages. We lead the country in foreclosures, so that's an indirect impact there. Where's your financing coming from? Because the Federal banks are not going to lend dollars; credit unions and people like that are not going to touch it. And, you know, we argue that folks should have, if it becomes legal, all these little businesses. We know that it costs millions of dollars at one tier of the business side. And that means that the only people of color who can run those businesses, who will get involved, will be Queen Latifah, Michael Jordan; you know, Shaq -- people from New Jersey like that.

Or, if you go to the storefronts in New Jersey -- you're talking anyplace in \$250,000-plus to even kind of start up there. So where do we go? Do we go to loan sharks, or we go to the street corners and borrow from the drug dealer? I mean, tell me -- where do we get the money from?

MR. GRANT: So what we've done -- as California Minority Alliance, what we've done is created a fund. We brought in other people who want to invest in the cannabis industry, but do not want to work in it. We have pulled a fund together. Right now, it's about \$50 million-- (cell phone rings) And I'm sorry; I thought I turned this darn thing off. I guess I don't know how to control it, but anyway-- We pulled a fund of over \$50 million together for our social equity program and building. We have more people who-- I actually just got off the phone, before I boarded a flight, that another group wants to give us \$100 million for our social equity. So you'll find that there are people who want to invest in this industry, and see that social equity being a great way to invest; but not actually being physically participating in the industry.

I would suggest doing the same thing. We are a nonprofit organization, super PAC, (c)(4); and we made sure that we put that component together. Because me being the leader of the social equity program, I'm not going to walk away from it without seeing that level of success.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; thank you very much, once again, Mr. Grant. And, you know, hopefully your flight back is a safe journey, okay?

MR. GRANT: Thank you; thank you for having me.

SENATOR RICE: Sure. (applause)

Next we're going to have Mr. Ron Importico (indicating pronunciation); did I pronounce that correctly?

SENATOR GILL: Sir, we'll have your information?

MR. GRANT: (off mike) Yes.

SENATOR GILL: You're going to-- Oh, at some point--

MR. GRANT: Yes, I'll get it--

SENATOR GILL: Okay.

MR. GRANT: Yes; thanks.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike) We had a mistake; because he has to leave -- Kevin Sabet.

SENATOR RICE: Oh, okay; Mr. Importico, give me one moment, okay?

We're going to call up, next, Dr. Kevin Sabet.

Yes, I'm sorry; I skipped over your name.

KEVIN A. SABET, Ph.D.: It's easy to miss.

SENATOR RICE: Well, it wasn't easy. I just didn't highlight it. (laughter)

DR. SABET: Thank you very much, Senators, Assemblywomen.

My name is Kevin Sabet; I'm the President of a group called SAM -- Smart Approaches to Marijuana -- which was co-founded with Representative Patrick Kennedy, a Brigantine resident.

I have studied, researched, and written about drug policy for more than 25 years. From 2009 to 2011, I was the Senior Drug Policy Advisor for President Obama; and co-wrote the Obama Administration's National Drug Control Strategy. I am currently an affiliated fellow at Yale University, where I do research on drug policy; and I am the author of a book called *Reefer Sanity*.

This testimony is really based on my own expertise, and that of over a dozen scientists who serve on the Advisory Board of SAM. SAM is an organization-- And I think it's important to remember, with witnesses and testimony, obviously, where funding and support comes from. I'm proud to say that SAM receives no funding from either Big Pharma, the pharmaceutical companies; obviously, the alcohol and tobacco industries. We're funded by small family foundations related to health; and unfortunately, folks who have had tragedies in their family who want to give back to the community.

We believe -- and why we have a bipartisan group and a group led by scientists -- that we do not have to have a false dichotomy with regards to marijuana that says we only have two choices, and those two choices are either incarceration, criminalization, war on drugs on the one hand; or legalization on the other. In fact, our limited experience with legalization shows that the vast majority of store owners and, beyond that,

producers, distributors of marijuana -- under state legal regimes -- are folks who already have many means and are, by far, white men. Males, white males, are the vast majority of those owners and distributors, and the vast majority of those making money.

We work with dozens of state and local jurisdictions on drug policy; most recently, Compton, California. Compton, California rejected marijuana shops, 77 percent “no” to 23 percent. We worked with those officials who believe, really, that more marijuana shops and more drugs were not going to be helpful to their community.

We also just undertook a study for the state of Connecticut. We found that, in Connecticut, the costs associated with marijuana legalization would total more than \$216 million a year, compared to about \$100 million in projected tax revenue. And this isn't surprising; when we look at alcohol and tobacco, we know that for every \$1 in alcohol and tobacco revenue we pay \$10 in lost social costs. We did a very conservative study that found for marijuana it was about \$2 or \$3 to \$1. We also found a similar number in Rhode Island, and we're happy to provide that.

We also know that the issue with legalization in many states is new; and I think it's premature to say that we have the answers in every single state. We don't. I was curious to hear the gentleman from California before me talk about homelessness in California, for a couple of reasons: One -- and that's my native state -- California has only had recreational marijuana for a number of months now. The medical marijuana has been for 20 years, but that was really an unregulated system for most of the time in California. But number two, the *New York Times* just did a big expose on homelessness in December -- and I'd invite you to have the article; we can

submit -- where it actually talks about California's homelessness population vastly increasing over the last few years. I'm not saying that's due to marijuana, but I think we need to be very careful when we look at, sort of, the experiences of other states, and also some of the statistics that are being thrown out.

Our statistics are peer-reviewed by scientists from research universities who are not in the industry and have nothing to gain by actually, sort of, telling American people to pause when it comes to legalization.

We've also seen in states that the disproportionate impact on minority communities persists. Colorado has not decriminalized marijuana; it has legalized the possession, cultivation, distribution, and sales of marijuana since 2014, which was when they implemented "regulation." That's when the statistics that Bishop James was talking about -- about the increase in minority youth for marijuana. And we shouldn't be surprised, because we see there's a disproportionate increase in arrests for alcohol as well. Alcohol is legal, but there are twice as many people in this country arrested for alcohol-related violations due to DUI, public use, selling to minors -- twice as many for alcohol than for all drugs combined. So unfortunately, we do have disproportionate impacts, but they are throughout our criminal justice system. And the idea that we would be solving those disproportionate impacts through marijuana legalization really flies in the face of the research we have on different drugs, and how alcohol is already disproportionately affecting lower-income communities.

We think that legalization would also increase overall marijuana use; overall marijuana use rates are up in legal states, but really

they're up in most states that have lax policies. And we're concerned about that because a 2017 report by the National Academy of Sciences, written by the top scientists in the country, included over 10,000 peer-reviewed articles on marijuana.

I think there's a myth that marijuana hasn't been researched because it's illegal. There are actually tens of thousands of articles where it has been researched. And, essentially, the National Academy found respiratory problems, mental health issues, increased risk of car crashes, progression, and dependence on tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Interestingly, with marijuana, we're finding that smoking has been out of vogue for most teens, thankfully. It took a hundred years to get there, because we were really bamboozled by the tobacco industry. But thankfully, recently, we've had a reduction in smoking. Unfortunately, what we're finding is that marijuana actually is reintroducing, to a whole generation of kids, the idea of smoking, especially with e-cigarettes and vaporizing; whereas, maybe the older generation would have rejected that.

We're also seeing learning, memory, and attention loss, and issues with pregnancy and postpartum women.

A study from March 2017 said that there were clear associations between marijuana use and subsequent mental health and substance abuse. And so we think expanding marijuana use, therefore, would be irresponsible.

The National Academy also reported that in states where cannabis is "legal" there is increased risk of unintentional overdose injuries in children.

You know, since Colorado, Washington, Alaska and, in some ways, the District of Columbia legalized marijuana, we are seeing past-month use of drugs continuing to rise above the national average. Alaska and Oregon are actually leading the country in youth marijuana use, and they have had “legal” regulated marijuana for a few years.

I’m proud that a few members of our staff are here to talk about the Colorado experience; a 20-year resident of Denver to tell you what’s going on there, as well as a resident of Washington D.C. So I won’t linger on those states. But we’re seeing some new data come out of Alaska; we’re seeing that in Anchorage, for example, the suspensions for marijuana use and possession increased by more than 141 percent since legalization. And it’s true that it’s still illegal if you’re under 21, just like alcohol is legal if you’re under 21. But when its normalized, promoted, and commercialized, that age barrier means very little compared to what the industry can do. And that’s why even in a state like Alaska or in Washington state, where it is legal -- and they call it *adult-use* also -- they want to think they’re keeping it away from those under 21. They’re actually seeing violations among businesses, undercover sting operations; Washington and Oregon have found numerous-- Actually, a recent sting found a fourth of all retailers were found to be selling marijuana to minors. So we are very concerned even under a “regulated market.”

We also think that when you add up the costs, that legalization would be a strain on the budget. Unless any legalization bill comes with corresponding increases in DUI enforcement, you’re going to need more law enforcement, not fewer law enforcement, under legalization because of DUI, public use, and second-hand smoke -- remember, that’s a big negative

externality from legalization -- along with other issues that you're going to have to invest in as a result of increased use.

And I just think when we look at our experience with legal drugs today -- federally legal drugs, like alcohol and tobacco -- currently those drugs account for more killing than all drugs combined. It wipes the opioid epidemic off of the map, in terms of the death and destruction from our legal drugs. Ten times as many people are killed from our legal drugs than opioids in the height of our opioid and heroin-fentanyl epidemic.

So looking at those two drugs as examples, I'm not sure why we would want to repeat those mistakes. In fact, a recent study about tobacco in the state of California found that massive long-term health impacts are not being reaped -- countered by the tax revenue at all.

We're also concerned about the underground market under legalization. There's sometimes a false view that if you legalize marijuana, we're able to turn those dealers into legitimate businesspeople; that we don't have a black market, we don't have an underground market. And it's actually not what we've seen currently in our legal states. I think we're going to hear later from a very high level Captain in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, who will talk about what's going on in Nevada. But in Oregon, and in other states where they've legalized, they've seen dramatic increases in black market activity. I mean, in fact, Mexican drug cartels now exist in Alaska, where they did not before.

A leaked report out of the state of Oregon -- that was held back by the Governor, but it was leaked by somebody -- found that 70 percent of Oregon's marijuana transactions are illegal. They produce so much more

marijuana than their legal market calls for, and many people are able to get a legal license but really still be ingrained in the underground market.

We've also seen the issue of drugged driving. They're not here today, but yesterday SAM partnered with AAA in Maryland. And we partnered with AAA to raise awareness about what legalization would do to our roadways. We've seen -- and the AAA Foundation did research -- but there's been a doubling in traffic deaths related to marijuana since legalization.

Now, it's very hard to necessarily see -- did the marijuana exactly cause it? How much was in your system? In this study, they really took a very conservative level; in other words, they made sure there were no other drugs involved; they made sure that they were very high levels to indicate recent use, and they're finding an increase. We've also seen increases in other states.

So I think regardless of good intentions, legalization is a bad policy. Now, there was a reason why a social minded -- social justice-minded President of the United States, Barack Obama, did not and never did endorse the legalization of marijuana. The reason was because we knew about what the impact was going to be on the poorest in society. You know, some people in some communities, if they have a drug problem, they can go to Malibu, California, and pay \$100,000 a year for -- a *month*, I should say; not a year. I wish it was a year -- a month for treatment. They can afford not -- taking a job from their family member who doesn't require a drug test. They can afford some things on their records, if they do get in trouble, because they're not going to be asked that question on the black box when they apply for a job. And we knew-- And again, the reason why

the first African American President did not endorse legalization of marijuana was because we knew what the impact was going to be.

And, you know, I know there are good intentions. We need to have social justice; we absolutely should support efforts to remove criminal penalties for possession; to expunge records; to make sure that people who are living a life in recovery can get a college loan; can actually go and get a job; will not be discriminated against in hiring and educational practices. We have to make sure of that.

Legalization is an entirely different issue. And the idea that it can somehow bring social justice without bringing some of these big, negative consequences, I think is foolish. And I think that's why when you look at who is pushing for the legalization of marijuana, it's very important to ask what their profit sheet looks like, and does it come from the continued selling, marketing, and commercialization of marijuana.

You know, we were fooled in this country, for a century, by Joe Camel, by the Marlboro Man, by the Winston Man, by advertisements from Newport and Kool that told us how cool it was. And let me tell you, *Kool* was not a coincidental name for a cigarette company. We were told this for a hundred years. We had an industry that funded their own research; that had their lobbyists; that had all of them in every single state capital go against prevention and treatment folks who were saying, since the 1920s, that tobacco caused lung cancer. That wasn't the 1980s; that was the 1920s when they found out the link between tobacco and lung cancer.

We are worried that history is repeating itself. And I think before that happens, we need to stop it, we need to take a collective pause, and really do our research and really see who this is going to affect.

Ironically, we think it will not reduce underground markets or criminal activities. And that is why we really join every single major medical association in the country by not supporting marijuana legalization, but supporting research into marijuana's potential for benefits for medicine. If marijuana has medical benefits, let's isolate those benefits and prescribe those medications to people who need them. That's a very different issue than legalization.

If we need social justice -- which we do in this state; New Jersey is, unfortunately, one of the few states that still has criminal penalties on the books for possession -- let's focus on that. And I'm encouraged by the Bill that was just dropped on that issue. But these are separate from the overall issue of legalization.

Thank you for hearing me today.

SENATOR RICE: Any questions for Kevin?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes, sir. I have one question.

Cannabis -- helping people who are on heroin?

DR. SABET: Great question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Can you talk about that?

DR. SABET: Absolutely; that's a great question.

There has been a recent slew of -- basically a few studies that have found that, in some states where they've allowed more marijuana access, they've seen a reduction in opioid fatalities.

There are a couple of problems with those studies, and issues, that a lot of people have. First of all, they're very new, and we need to see what's going on with the other research. So I don't think it's a case. But I

think, more importantly, from an intellectual point of view, that's a separate issue than legalization. Even if I were to say that I believed those studies, and the jury is in, and we know that marijuana is a substitute for people who have pain, that is a totally separate issue than the legalization of marijuana.

If you believe marijuana is a substitute for pain for opioids, legalize it for the medical purposes for that. That's a separate issue than-- We don't legalize all medicine just because we think they're good for people, right? So we have to watch that one.

But more importantly, those studies have not controlled for other factors that could be responsible for reducing opioid use. So the studies that you mentioned didn't control for increased naloxone use, and increased police training for overdose prevention. Maybe that was the reason there was a reduction. So there are other, more technical, aspects of those studies that have problems.

The most recent study on this, from the Rand Corporation -- which I very much respect -- actually found that, after 2012, the effect of the reduction of opioids was not seen at all. So it could be a totally different reason. If the opioid thing is a substitute, we should be seeing this, certainly after 2012, because that was actually the time when marijuana expanded, right? So you shouldn't be not seeing the effect of substitution after marijuana expanded, if marijuana is the reason. So I think there are very gross misinterpretations of those studies. Again, it reminds me of some of the tobacco studies when things were not sure; the industry would seize on them, and do press releases on them, and it would make the researchers kind of horrified.

In this case, the same thing is happening. A lot of the researchers of these studies are saying, “Wait, wait. There are a lot of caveats to this. Don’t make big generalizations.” And remember, even if you believe it, it’s about medical, not recreational. I think that’s a very important point. Even if you were to believe this new research, and you want to throw away the decades of research that actually shows marijuana can lead -- not in all instances -- can lead to heroin use, even if you want to do that and you say, “I don’t believe gateway; I believe, instead, it’s a substitute,” that’s a medical issue, not a recreational one.

And finally, I just want to say this on gateway. The vast majority of people who use marijuana will not go on to use cocaine or heroin; we’re not saying that. However, however, there’s another side to that, if we’re going to be honest with ourselves. Ninety-seven percent of people dependent on heroin or cocaine absolutely had marijuana before that. So it depends on whether you’re looking at the glass half-full or half-empty. It reminds me of seatbelts. Most people who don’t wear seatbelts actually won’t die in a car crash. But if you wear a seatbelt, you’re much more likely not to die. Most people who smoke marijuana, use marijuana-- We shouldn’t say *smoke*; and sometimes when we’re talking about marijuana, we’re really talking about THC. Let’s be clear; we’re talking about the THC, the concentrates, the infusions, the edibles. It’s not passing around a roach clip anymore. I used the term *roach clip* in a high school the other day; they thought I was talking about insect extermination -- the kids. (laughter) They didn’t know what it was. So let’s be very clear that we’re also talking about a totally different product. The vast majority of those people actually don’t like it; they will use it once or twice and they

won't use it again. Some of those people will have a drug problem -- a more serious dependence. They will use it -- unfortunately, the story that we heard earlier -- clearly there was dependence and an addiction there. And a small portion of those will go onto other substances.

So it's -- really, you have to understand both sides of the gateway issue. But I have never met a parent -- and I, unfortunately, have met hundreds -- who lost a son or daughter to the opioid epidemic who did not say that, "It started with just a little bit of pot. We thought it was no big deal, because we remembered using pot back in the day. And most of us got out fine. We would never think of using heroin; that was, like, the scariest thing." And they were shocked to see how fast that progression was.

So it really depends on the perspective.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thank you.

Does anybody have any questions? (no response)

Thank you.

DR. SABET: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: So before we proceed, I wanted to acknowledge Mayor Bhalla from Hoboken; he's here. And I also want to acknowledge Assemblywoman Jimenez; she has joined us. And about 15, 20 minutes ago, we did have Councilwoman-at-Large Joyce Waterman here; and Councilman Jermaine Robinson from Jersey City.

So now we would like to bring up Ron Importico. He is the CEO of ICC.

RON IMPORTICO: Good morning.

My name is Ron Importico, President and Founder of Industrial Cooling Corporation, ICC; headquartered in Metuchen, New Jersey. I am a lifelong resident of the State of New Jersey.

I'd like to thank Senator Rice, and fellow members of the Black Caucus, for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the proposed legislation to legalize recreational marijuana in New Jersey.

As a father, legalizing recreational marijuana gives me great concerns for my family's future. What I mean by this is the environment that we will be exposed to in our towns that would be selling the drugs.

Think of the curiosity of a child who is walking on a downtown street, on a sunny afternoon, seeing advertisement for ice cream, candy, or soda that's infused with THC; or the exposure of the people who would be at those establishments. I know I don't want my child, or any other child, around that environment. I think we have enough problems; our hands full with alcohol and tobacco today.

I am also greatly concerned as a business owner in New Jersey. My company has over 100 employees, which consist of service technicians, facility engineers, and office personnel. We employ only experienced service technicians and installers who are industry- and factory-certified in a large variety of manufacturers. For example, we work on Trane equipment, Johnson, York, Carrier, Mammoth, and Dunham-Bush. What I have experienced over the last 30 years in business is a sad deterioration of motivated human beings who have started experimenting with marijuana. It often leads to much worse. I have seen people start with a little marijuana, for which they quickly slid into the lack of motivation and the

will to better themselves. As the downward spiral continues, there's lost time on the job due to lack of interest and health.

Ultimately, this leads to loss of employment. Hopefully, this is challenged long before an accident occurs, which affects the company and increases the cost of doing business.

In earlier days of business, this behavior was tolerated; however, today the workplace has changed dramatically, and our employees are closely screened before being allowed to work on sites.

I have concern about how I will protect my company's interest, should recreational marijuana be legalized in New Jersey. It has taken over 33 years to build an impressive Fortune 500 customer base. With more people using marijuana, we can expect, from the findings in Colorado and Washington, I would have to recruit personnel from outside of New Jersey to meet the testing requirements so we may continue to work on their sites. Large businesses in Colorado now stated that, after legalization, they had to hire out-of-state residents to find employees who can pass a pre-employment drug test screen.

The CEO of a large Colorado construction company, GE Johnson, has said his company "has encountered so many candidates who have failed pre-employment drug tests because of their THC use, that it is actively recruiting construction workers from out of state."

Data from the major drug testing firm, Quest Diagnostics, analyzes millions of results of workplace drug tests each year. They recently reported a 47 percent spike in the rate of positive oral marijuana test results in U.S. workplaces, from 2013 to 2015; and more detailed data shows an incredible increase of 178 percent rise in that rate, from 2011 to 2015.

Quest Diagnostics also noted surges in positive test rates for marijuana in Colorado and Washington state following legalization.

The years following legalization, marijuana positivity rates -- with urine tests in Colorado and Washington -- increased 20 to 23 percent, respectively, compared to the 5 percent average increase among the U.S. general workforce.

Marijuana legalization also involves significant risks to existing businesses. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, illegal drug use is responsible for annual economic losses of over \$80 billion. As marijuana is by far the most widely used illegal drug, it is unsurprising that its use would trigger significant losses on its own.

Unlike cigarettes, the psychoactive properties intoxicate and create tangible problems in the workplace. A peer-reviewed study of thousands of employees indicated that marijuana users were unjustifiably absent from work 77 percent more often than non-users, and had a rate of workplace injuries 85 percent higher than a control group.

They were also involved in workplace disciplinary incidents at a rate 55 percent higher than the control group, but there is less data available to quantify the costs of such behavior to an employers' bottom line.

Data from the National Drug Use and Health, the nation's premier annual survey on drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, supports these conclusions. Per 2014, people who used marijuana in the last month were, even when controlling for alcohol use, 40 percent more likely to have missed at least one day of work in the last month due to injury or sickness; and 106 percent more likely -- that is, more than twice as likely -- to have

missed at least one day of work in the last month because they “just didn't want to be there.”

The ability to work in our industry that has many dangers that we are exposed to -- from high voltage, rigging heavy equipment, as well as high pressure gasses -- requires that our personnel are very keen and have total awareness of his or her surroundings. With the loss of this, accidents will occur. Lost time and injuries affect more than just the employee -- he or she loses compensation, but as well as the company's losses. Insurance premiums go up, MOD rates increase; therefore, an increase in operating expenses. And when the mod rate is unacceptable, or does not meet our client's requirement, we can no longer work for them.

When the MOD rate is increased, it takes three years before they will change the rating. So the company will carry a three-year increased insurance premium, as well as lost income, because we could not work for the client. This is standard in our industry; therefore, it would be necessary to reduce my workforce because I wouldn't have the work.

It saddens me to think that we would place financial gains ahead of the welfare of our children and their future. In society today, we know the pressure our children are exposed to. When self-esteem is compromised, it is human nature to find something to make us escape, either through positive or negative actions, which all has consequences.

In the business world, we put great emphasis on marketing, and we know this would be geared to our children and young adults, again all for financial gain and the dim future of our children.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thank you.

Any questions?

SENATOR GILL: I think maybe just one.

On the issue of the workplace--

MR. IMPORTICO: Yes.

SENATOR GILL: I don't think that's an issue in which government intrudes. If the people want to have the job, and the job requires that you not have-- You cannot use marijuana if you want this job. And so I think that is an issue of personal responsibility, and may not be a reason, totally, to not support the legalization of marijuana.

I understand your issue totally; I'm just thinking about it from the issue of governmental responsibility. That's a personal responsibility that would not necessarily mitigate against the legalization of marijuana if we decide to do it.

But I think it is an issue that we should pay close attention to, from workplace safety. So your testimony was very important in that aspect, and I appreciate it.

MR. IMPORTICO: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thank you, Ron.

Okay, next we will have Anthony Ranallo; is he here?

ANTHONY RANALLO: Good morning.

My name is Anthony Ranallo, and I'm actually the Safety Officer for Industrial Cooling Corporation.

First, I want to thank everyone for allowing me to speak today.

I've been a New Jersey resident my entire life. I was in the United States Air Force for 10 years, I've been in the construction field for over 20 years, and I've been a safety professional for 9 years.

I believe legalizing marijuana for recreational use is a mistake. The construction field alone is a very dangerous occupation without any outside negative influences. Most everyday injuries in the workplace range from a small cut on the finger, falling from heights, and everything in between. Without total concentration on the job, the injuries are sure to rise at an alarming rate.

At any given time someone can get electrocuted, fall from a height, lose an eye, and become trapped or engulfed -- and these are just a few of the injuries that are mandated by the Occupational Health and Safety to be reported at the incident. What will happen if workers are eating edibles with THC, consuming drink beverages and, frankly, just getting high?

Right now, there's no way to tell if this is happening in the workplace and, unlike alcohol, there is no test that we can perform on the job.

In the event recreational marijuana becomes legal, there will be no way to tell if people are using before, after, and, yes, even during work. No telling what will happen to our New Jersey workforce if we allow recreational marijuana to become legal.

I understand not everyone in the state is participating in the use of recreational marijuana; but right now, the law is our largest deterrent, and we will still find individuals using recreational marijuana. The employees in the state, as well as the employers, will suffer as injuries rise, lost days will rise, and Total Recordable Incident Rates will increase, affecting our Experience Modification Ratings. These are the industry ratings that directly affect workman's comp to rise and fall. The increased

ratings will affect employers from bidding on larger corporate jobs and/or maintaining the clients they already have, not counting the insurance costs and the potential for Occupational Safety and Health Administration fines.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration was developed to protect the everyday worker. I'm sure when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration was developed, legalizing marijuana was the last thing on their mind.

Companies put together a drug and alcohol policy to protect themselves and their employees. How are they to expect the employees to recognize the policy if the State of New Jersey does not? Eventually, companies most affected may choose to reduce work force and may even be forced to close their doors.

In closing, I would just ask, why would we put our most valuable assets at a higher risk than already exists?

Anyway, please speak out against the legalization of recreational marijuana, and let's hold our state to the standard that we are accustomed to.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Are there any questions from anyone for Anthony?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: No.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Did you leave a copy?

MR. RANALLO: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

Our next presenter is going to be Mr. (*sic*) Morgan Thompson.

MORGAN THOMPSON: (off mike) It's *Miss*.

SENATOR RICE: Is that Mister or Ms.? Ms. Morgan, because I know *Morgan* is also a woman's name, right?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; all right.

MS. MORGAN: I'm a girl today. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: How are you doing? Okay.

How are you, Ms. Thompson?

MS. THOMPSON: I'm good; how are you?

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

Would you give your name and organization represented, address, and all that kind of stuff?

MS. THOMPSON: Sure. My name is Morgan Thompson. I work with Prevention Links, and I'm also a person in long-term recovery. Prevention Links is based in Union County, and I live in Hunterdon County.

So as I said, I'm a person in long-term recovery. What this means for me is that I've been drug and alcohol free since 2009, after experiencing a severe substance use disorder throughout my teenage years that began with marijuana and ended in heroin and crack cocaine.

I'm also the Director of Academic and Recovery Support Services for Prevention Links and the Raymond J. Lesniak Experience Strength and Hope Recovery High School. We provide recovery, support, and educational services to youth and emerging adults who have been impacted by substance use disorders, and their families.

While I do believe that anecdotal evidence should always be supported by well-conducted, replicated data -- which has been presented here today -- it is important to understand the profound depth of pain and suffering individuals with substance use disorders experience, particularly when they begin using in their youth and it continues over the course of a lifetime. For this reason, I share my story with you today.

When I began using marijuana at the age of 13, I did not have shame or fear in using the drug. I kind of grew up believing that it was safe and natural, maybe misunderstood by the government and society. My family had lax attitudes toward it as well, and were uneducated about the dangers, particularly for the developing brain. So they weren't particularly concerned; I would say they were concerned, but they weren't taking a very aggressive approach when they knew that I was using marijuana.

So I think it's important, you know-- I don't know if I agree with the concept of marijuana being a gateway drug; I think it's a bit of an overgeneralization -- at least not in the sense that society has come to understand that term. But what I do know is that, for me, and for most of my friends in recovery, and for most of the students I have worked with over the years, marijuana is where the story began.

I don't know many people who become addicted to heroin in their late teens and early twenties who weren't experimenting with marijuana as a young teen or sooner. Again, I don't want to suggest that everyone who uses marijuana as a teenager, or even later in life, is going to become addicted to it or to other substances. But there is ample research pointing to the danger of regular marijuana exposure on the developing

brain, and it can impair the parts of the brain that actually help youth to develop the ability to say “no” -- to self-regulate.

Using marijuana regularly in adolescence can alter the brain in ways that make a child more vulnerable to addiction as they grow up, particularly if they have a genetic predisposition to addiction, a mental health condition, or have experienced abuse or neglect.

I entered high school as a near-daily marijuana user, and I left high school experimenting with opiates and cocaine. By the time I entered college I was physically dependent, and dropped out of school after two weeks. I tried to attend community college, and I failed out, too far gone into the depths of my addiction. I was very lucky that when I reached a point at which I was willing to receive help of some kind, my parents were incredibly supportive and had excellent insurance that enabled me to receive all the treatment services I required. Not all families are so lucky. I have been drug and alcohol free since I was 18 years old, and I have been able to pursue a life of meaning and fulfillment in recovery.

But my story, sadly, is the exception and not the norm. It's important to know that I am not standing before you nearly nine years clean, stably employed and finishing a master's program because I am strong, or smart, or special. It took several years of therapeutic and recovery support, access to education and employment, stable housing, financial support from my family, and so much more to make my recovery possible.

I have made it my mission to do everything in my power to make those same resources available to every young person struggling with

addiction. But I can tell you that is a very challenging mission, because the resources simply aren't there in sufficient numbers.

Legalization of recreational marijuana will mean that more children are using drugs earlier. Some of them will grow out of it, never use other drugs, and never become addicted. But a percentage of them will; and the more youth who are using marijuana, the higher that number will equate to.

In an already resource-scarce field, are we ready to invest the necessary funding and infrastructure into providing adequate prevention, treatment, and recovery support services to address that growing need? My guess is that we will plan to, we'll talk about the potential revenue generation and how it will help with addictions, we'll make big projections. And then, like we have seen with alcohol and tobacco, we will realize that the societal costs far outweigh the actual revenue generated; we will see that the projected tax revenues aren't quite what we had hoped, like other states are seeing; and we will be stuck with another generation of drug dependent young adults with insufficient resources to treat their health condition.

There is little that legalization can accomplish that cannot be done so with properly implemented decriminalization efforts. And if we do opt to go that route, we will not have to contend with the force of a multi-billion dollar industry that will benefit no one but its leaders, while our young people's views are warped by aggressive marketing campaigns designed to make them a lifetime customer.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Questions from members?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes, I do.

So you work with teens? And does that include parents?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Now, are you working with parents whose teens are autistic?

MS. THOMPSON: I'm sorry?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Autism -- do you work with parents and--

MS. THOMPSON: No, no; I'm sorry. So teens who have experienced addictions themselves and who are in recovery are the students who I work with.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Okay.

MS. THOMPSON: I do not work with youth with autism; no.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Okay.

SENATOR RICE: So you are working with recovery people--

MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: --which is interesting. I received a letter, for the record, from Mr. David Kerr. Mr. David Kerr, for a number of years, ran Integrity House and other programs. I believe he's retired now, but he indicated that we need to put the brakes on the legalization talk; and raising the money off the back of addicts as they (indiscernible) years, especially when there's a waiting list for residential treatment. And he goes on, and on, and on.

And so it's good to know that someone is here giving us that perspective as well.

Any other questions for the young lady? (no response)

Okay.

SENATOR GILL: Good luck.

MS. THOMPSON: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Ms. Thompson, thank you very much.

MS. THOMPSON: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: And just keep doing what you're doing, and hang in there, okay? Keep the faith.

MS. THOMPSON: Okay; thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Next, we're going to have Mr. David Evans.

And after Mr. David Evans, I want Mr. Todd Raybuck to be on- deck.

DAVID G. EVANS, Esq.: Senator Rice and the members of the Legislative Black Caucus--

SENATOR RICE: Excuse, Mr. Evans. Why don't you center yourself so you know you're talking into all those mikes? Because one is for the people to hear, and one is being recorded.

MR. EVANS: Oh, I see; got it.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

MR. EVANS: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: You know the routine; you've been doing this. You just retired--

MR. EVANS: Huh? (laughter) Well, I'm used to appearing before a judge, not a Senator. (laughter) I'm a little more intimidated appearing before Senators than judges. At least I know I can appeal the decision, based on a judge.

SENATOR RICE: Exactly.

MR. EVANS: To give you a little bit of my background -- my years of experience that has brought me here today.

SENATOR RICE: Give us your name and all that.

MR. EVANS: I'm David Evans--

SENATOR RICE: Yes--

MR. EVANS: --and I am an attorney--

SENATOR RICE: --address and--

MR. EVANS: I have a law practice in Flemington, New Jersey.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

MR. EVANS: I am a former Public Defender in the City of Newark. Early in my career, I spent two years here in the Adult Trial Division. My first job out of law school was working for the New Jersey Association on Corrections, where my job was to set up diversion programs for people in prisons and throughout the court systems.

I worked for the New Jersey Department of Health, where my job there was setting up programs -- achievement programs for people in prisons and in the court system. I spent many, many years working to get people out of prison, getting them into diversion programs, getting them into treatment.

I then ran the New Jersey Intoxicated Driving Program for several years. That program had the lowest recidivism rate in the country for DUI offenders. We emphasize treatment, evaluation; and we guaranteed free treatment to anybody who needed it. And the way we did that was that we went to the treatment programs and said, "Look, we'll put you on our treatment list, but you have to agree to take one person for free

out of every 10 who we send to you.” As far as I know, nobody ever was denied treatment for lack of money.

I am against the legalization of marijuana. I think we can achieve social justice here in several other ways, other than legalizing marijuana. The Bill that Senator Rice has come up with, with Senator Singer -- and I believe Senator Gill is also signing onto that -- I think will be a big step in that direction. We can -- it needs a little tweaking as far as I'm concerned, but I think we have enough existing programs in New Jersey where we can use the system, change it in some ways, to provide that social justice with marijuana offenses.

Kids -- I'm very concerned about kids getting into treatment. I'm a recovered addict; I have been straight now 48 years. The first illegal drug I used was marijuana. The guy who introduced me to marijuana introduced me to amphetamines, and I moved on from there to opiates. I went through withdrawal in my fraternity bedroom in 1969 and got into recovery; and I've had a dignified life since. I've been happily married, I have two good children, I've had a successful career, and I have had six books published. And all of that can happen, and I want that to happen to other kids. I don't want other kids to go through what I went through -- not only in my addiction, but for years after, in my recovery. There were a lot of problems that I had to face.

My expertise is-- I have a little piece of expertise for you -- is that I was the President of an emergency rescue squad for many years; a volunteer squad. I also served as an EMT on a fire company. So I have put people in body bags from car crashes, and I have dealt with a lot of young people who were seriously injured from car crashes. So my personal

experience in recovery, and my experience as an EMT on the streets -- this is not an academic exercise for me. I've seen the reality of the kind of mayhem that drugs can cause. I have personally been involved with it.

I'm going to talk about intoxicated driving, because that's what I was asked to do.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration lists marijuana as the most prevalent drug in fatally injured drivers; 28 percent of them tested positive for marijuana. Now, did marijuana cause the accident? I don't know, but it certainly didn't help, okay? I've been under the influence of marijuana, and I can assure you that it did not make me a safer driver or a better human being.

What about our kids -- because I'm pretty concerned about kids. The people in the marijuana industry from California and Colorado will paint a rosy picture for you. They're going to tell you whatever they think that you want to hear so they can continue in this business. I was interested in the comments -- the gentleman from California; he has not convinced Senator Diane Feinstein -- who has been a Senator there for 20-some years -- of the benefits of legalization. She's completely opposed to it.

They recently did a study where they went to a marijuana conference in San Francisco and pulled samples of marijuana products that were being sold. This is medical marijuana. Now, he was claiming that the state had it all together after 20 years. Ninety-three percent of those specimens tested positive for pesticides. They did a similar study in San Diego; 80 percent tested positive for pesticides. That's the marijuana industry for you -- selling products contaminated with pesticides. I'll be happy to give those studies.

When I talk about being against the legalization of marijuana, I start off by asking people three questions: “How many of you think that the tobacco industry is looking out for your family’s best interests?” Nobody raises their hand. Then I say, “How many of you think that the drug cartels are looking out for your family’s best interest?” Nobody raises their hand. And then I ask, “What makes you think the marijuana industry is going to be any different?” Okay; they’re not. They’re not going to be any different than the tobacco industry or anybody else who stands to make money.

But what about our kids? Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among people 16 to 25 years old. Weekend, night time driving under the influence of marijuana among young drivers has increased by 48 percent; pretty substantial. About 13 percent of high school seniors said they drove after using marijuana, while only 10 percent drove after having five or more drinks. So kids are more likely to drive high on pot than they are high on alcohol, and I think it’s because they don’t perceive that marijuana is as dangerous, to them or others, as the alcohol is.

Another study showed that 28,000 seniors each year in the United States admitted to having at least one motor vehicle accident or dangerous incident after using marijuana. So if we legalize marijuana in New Jersey, more kids are going to be using marijuana. Again, look at the example with alcohol. They’re going to have more access to it; and the states that have legalized it have not been able to stop it. Colorado is number one in terms of kids using marijuana in the country.

I had a chance to read an editorial from the *Colorado Springs Gazette* about legalization there, and this is what the *Colorado Springs Gazette*

says. Residential neighborhoods “reek of marijuana.” Marijuana smells; marijuana growing operations really smell bad.

Homeless substance abusers migrate there. I have a document from the City of Pueblo, Colorado, where I think it’s either a third or half of the people who are on welfare came there -- okay? -- so they could smoke pot. So their welfare costs have gone up -- I think it’s either a third or a half -- have gone up because people have migrated there, homeless people, to get marijuana.

There is a doubling of drivers involved in fatal crashes who tested positive for marijuana. If you want that on our roadways because you think it’s a good idea that we should make money on marijuana, this is what you’re going to get.

School drug violations, in K to 12 schools, increased 45 percent. So we’re talking about adult marijuana use -- somehow that *adult* thing is not filtering down to the kids.

School suspensions for drugs have increased 45 percent. We want to keep kids in school; we don’t want to get kids out of school. And Colorado is first in the country for marijuana use among teens.

I don’t want this for my neighborhood; I don’t think you would want it for your neighborhood either, or for your kids. And I think we have to take a real good look at this. Talk to people from Colorado; not to the government, not to people from the marijuana industry, but people who live there. And talk about, with them, about their daily experience of living with marijuana and what it’s like. And I’ll get you some of those documents.

Senator Gill -- I am a student of the Federal drug laws and how they interact with the states. I've written a couple of briefs for the U.S. Supreme Court on this issue. I have a legal primer on the subject, that I'll be happy to leave with you, that explains all of this. Marijuana, as far as the Federal government is concerned, is not a state's rights issue. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled on this a couple of times, because marijuana affects interstate commerce; even marijuana that's grown and used in the state affects interstate commerce. It is a matter for Federal regulation; it's very, very clear that that's the case.

I want to raise just a couple of other issues with you; I'll be providing you all this documentation. Marijuana -- there's a clear link now between marijuana use and mental illness, particularly with young people. Now, who says that? It's not just me saying that; the American Psychiatric Association says that, the U.S. Surgeon General says that, the National Academy of Sciences says that, the World Health Organization says that. They've all produced documents saying that there is a connection between marijuana use and mental illness.

Pregnancy. I'm going to be submitting a paper to you about marijuana and pregnancy, and how it causes a variety of problems with children in terms of their neural development. The marijuana industry encourages pregnant women to use marijuana. And I'm going to prove that to you; I have the documentation. Pregnant women are increasing their use of marijuana, in large part because they are being told it helps with nausea and they perceive that it's not risky. I'm going to be submitting the studies to you showing you that it is risky to women who are pregnant. It affects their children later on.

Violence. We all know that pot smokers are laid back dudes, right? Not true. The latest studies show that there is a connection between marijuana use and violence, and I think primarily because of the connection with mental illness. I again am going to give you peer-reviewed studies that show this. I've looked at this very, very carefully.

So those are some things that I'd like you to think about. And I want to end with two points.

The marijuana of today is not the marijuana that I smoked in college. Back then, I smoked 2 or 3 percent marijuana. It got me plenty stoned; it was adequate, trust me. There is now marijuana products that are 99 percent THC; 99 percent THC. We don't even know the impact that that's going to have on teenage brains. And the marijuana industry wants to sell those products with 99 percent THC. Those are going to be in edibles, and drinks, and other variety of delivery systems. You're taking a huge risk if you're approving anything that is going to come up with that type of high level of marijuana (*sic*).

Then one other point -- we're in a church -- I'd had a chance, in my recovery, to renew my religious faith. And I'm just going to leave you with a question. Is legalizing marijuana going to improve the spiritual health of the people of New Jersey? I don't think so.

Thank you.

And I'll take any questions that you have.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

And if you could leave all that testimony with us, we'd appreciate it.

You did say one thing I just want to reiterate, for the record.

You mentioned the schools; and this is something that -- I don't know if the gentleman from California, and others might have stayed. New Jersey is one of the few states -- maybe the only state-- that actually took over and held, under its control -- made all the decisions on public schools. This city; Jersey City; Newark, New Jersey; Paterson, New Jersey; and, subsequent to that, Camden, New Jersey -- they ran the public education system for over 20 years. They literally killed our kids, because those kids, who dropped out of school because the schools weren't functioning under the State control, joined gangs and got themselves killed. We can't bring lawsuits, because we can't put the nexus there, but I think many of us know that that happened.

And now these kids have been running through urban cities -- like Newark, and Camden, and Jersey City, and Paterson, Passaic, and others -- looking at vacant lots, and abandoned buildings, and drug deals on corners, for a number of years. The State of New Jersey is now turning these school districts back over to local control with no money. But the local government and local people feel that they can do a better job of redirecting the kids and educating them.

And so this whole notion of now legalizing marijuana in these communities -- and many people (indiscernible) that's a detriment to taking over school districts and trying to move away from what the kids have been observing, and getting them functioning.

So I'm glad you brought up the education piece; because what we're trying to do, as the Legislative Black Caucus, is to bring to the community, and to the local government people, and others information that you need to be thinking about, regardless of what your decision is.

We're only getting information as to how to make money for some people -- not for the average person -- and information on how they are going to set black and brown people free. You know, and that's troublesome to some folks. There are other considerations that must be taken by those of us in the Legislature and by the community at large

So I want to thank you for your testimony, and for mentioning the education aspect of it.

MR. EVANS: Yes, just one thing about pot taxes and education.

And I can tell you what's going on in Colorado right now -- as how they got those things passed, saying that some of this pot money--

SENATOR RICE: Speak a little louder into the microphone.

MR. EVANS: Yes; the way that they got some of this passed in Colorado was to say that pot taxes will go towards education. The effect that that had is that it put the schools in a situation where they couldn't speak out against the abuses of the marijuana industry. Parents who go to the schools and object to what's going on in the schools with marijuana are intimidated because of the marijuana industry.

I have talked to teachers from Colorado. The school lunchrooms stink of marijuana because kids are bringing in edibles and eating them during the lunch period. So whenever you take a bribe -- you know, it's the golden rule: He who has the gold makes the rules. So if you're going to take pot money, tax pot money, you better be prepared to dance to the tune of the marijuana industry. And I don't think you want to put our schools under their control.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much, Mr. Evans. I really appreciate your testimony.

Next, we have Mr. Todd Raybuck, Commander, coming out of Las Vegas. I want to thank him very much for actually taking the time to come out to visit us. And as I told Mr. Grant, I hope it wasn't a red-eye; and if so, I hope you're wide awake right now, okay?

CAPTAIN TODD G. RAYBUCK: Good morning, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; good morning.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Actually, I got in last night at midnight and woke up at 1 a.m. my time. And so the time change on the East Coast here has played a little bit with me. But on the bright side, it's 20 degrees warmer here than it is in Las Vegas today. And it's raining, and we didn't see rain for almost 100 days recently. So I love your weather today.
(laughter)

I brought my testimony with me, but Honorable Senator Rice and distinguished members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, and legislative members, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the impact of marijuana legalization on Nevada.

During my career I've served in many positions, including narcotics detective, demand reduction coordinator, and traffic bureau supervisor. I've received the Nevada Governor's Award for Substance Abuse Education, as well as the Director's Award for Distinguished Service from the Office of the National Drug Control Policy.

I recently transferred, from Commander of the Organized Crime Bureau, to be the Commander of the Uniformed Patrol Bureau, back on the streets, working with the community that I love.

As a law enforcement professional I have seen, firsthand, the harmful impact marijuana has had in our families, on the roadways, and in my community.

I speak to you today as a citizen and concerned parent, worried about the future of our youth who are being told that using marijuana is just part of growing up. The lure of increased tax revenue and claims of a regulated system that will eliminate the criminal element and repair historical harms to the minority community is intoxicating. Yet, as we are learning in Nevada, the financial gains from the marijuana industry do not adequately support the resources needed to control the effects of marijuana legalization. And the promises of a regulated industry that will weed out the illegal marijuana market and improve social conditions in disadvantaged neighborhoods are contrary to the reality.

After huge swaths of money came in from out of state to support legalization, a simple majority of Nevada voters voted to legalize the production, wholesale, and retail sale of marijuana for personal use in November of 2016. On an accelerated timeline, adult retail marijuana sales began in July 2017.

Today, there are 61 retail marijuana stores operating in Nevada, with 47 of those locations in the Las Vegas valley. Only one of the Las Vegas valley marijuana establishments is African American owned.

The majority of legal marijuana establishments in Nevada are within the jurisdiction of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

Marijuana legalization has increased the department's responsibilities for marijuana industry owner and employee suitability investigations, legal marijuana business compliance checks, neighborhood complaints, and the increased illegal marijuana market. The bulk of marijuana enforcement responsibility falls on the local police department.

Despite these increased manpower needs, none of the state tax revenue from marijuana sales provides any additional local police resources now, or in the near future.

Nevada currently lacks the statewide data collection apparatus to identify the impact marijuana legalization is having on our youth, crime, hospitals, impaired driving, and the black market. Despite this, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department is already seeing a negative impact on crime and the black market. In 2017, homicides related to an altercation over drugs increased 21 percent, compared to 2016. Marijuana was the cause of the altercation in 53 percent of those homicides.

In 2017, 58 percent of all drug-related murders involved marijuana.

Despite the availability of a legal marijuana market, the marijuana

black market has also flourished since legalization. The legal possession of one ounce of marijuana has given street dealers the cover to carry marijuana for sale without scrutiny.

Underresourced minority youth and young adults risk arrest selling marijuana illegally to get a piece of the current legal marijuana market.

Marijuana legalization has led to a significant increase in the illegal marijuana market in the Las Vegas valley. Although legal marijuana customers are limited to the purchase and possession of one ounce of marijuana, there is no system in place to identify customers who make multiple one-ounce purchases from different retail establishments. As a result, legally purchased marijuana is being recovered in illegal drug transactions.

After retail marijuana legalization, illegal marijuana seizures have increased 47 percent in 2017 over 2016. Seizures of cannabis products from parcel facilities being shipped out of state also increased significantly in 2017. Marijuana seizures are up 111 percent; THC edibles up 455 percent. In 2016, we had zero seizures of THC oil; last year we recovered 36,000 grams being shipped out of state.

Seventy-two percent of drug parcels seized in 2017 contained marijuana products, and this is only within the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department jurisdiction. At least 10 percent of the marijuana recovered in those shipments can be traced back to legal purchases from dispensaries and production facilities. Based on the odor of some of the passengers on my flight coming into Jersey last night, it appears that some of them may have brought some more with them this morning. (laughter)

The increase in seizures has occurred despite the lack of increase in police resources. In addition to the increase in marijuana seizures, we've also seen a significant increase in cocaine seizures; an alarming 567 percent since 2016. Furthermore, there's a visible increase in black market marijuana sales and delivery services advertising on the internet and social media sites. Many of these advertisements use an

elaborate screening process to prevent detection and interference from law enforcement.

One recent pop-up party investigation located more than a dozen illegal marijuana vendors from California, set up in a warehouse, with more than 50 customers. Upon police entry into the location, the majority of persons fled from the area leaving behind 120 pounds of illegal black market marijuana, 150 pounds of black market edibles, \$30,000 in cash, and two firearms.

The true scale of black market operations in Nevada is still unknown. Marijuana legalization has also impacted the quality of life in the tourist corridors and in the neighborhoods, as you heard Mr. Evans just speak about. Public consumption of marijuana and possession within the gaming properties is illegal. After marijuana legalization, the volume of persons smoking marijuana in public within the tourist corridors has increased significantly. The dense population of tourists hinders police detection of the marijuana users. Gaming resort properties, which risk loss of their license for marijuana on their property, have seen an increase of marijuana use in hotel rooms, resulting in the loss of room availability for decontamination that sometimes results in the removal of carpet and upholstery,

Legalizing marijuana retail sales is only the beginning. The newly created retail marijuana industry in Nevada is now lobbying for an expansion of marijuana businesses, including marijuana consumption lounges, and marijuana-themed restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Attempting to claim a piece of the marijuana trade, illegal *potrepreneurs* have sprung up at non-marijuana licensed businesses and at unlicensed locations.

Pot party buses, marijuana yoga studios, and illegal marijuana delivery services are advertised openly. Las Vegas police do not have the resources to deal with an expanding legal market, let alone the illegal market. Less than half of the illegal marijuana complaints received by Las Vegas Metro narcotics section are able to be investigated.

Unfortunately, we have been led to believe that the only way to resolve the past failures of the drug war, and the disparate harms it has caused the minority community, is to legalize marijuana. However, Senator Rice's Bill to enact civil penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana is a well-reasoned approach and it should be seriously considered over legalization.

Ultimately, the decision is up to the elected officials and citizens of New Jersey. The question that begs an answer is, will legalizing, normalizing, and advertising marijuana sales and marijuana use improve New Jersey's families and communities. In Nevada, that answer is "no."

Senators, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for the opportunity, and I wish my best for all of you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much. Thank you for taking the time to travel such a distance to be here.

I think that testimony is very important.

And I just want to remind everybody here, and the media, is that if this appears to be one-sided, it is not intended that way. That's why we brought in Mr. Grant and some others. But by the same token, pretty much New Jersey has been having a conversation, and is still having conversations, with information from some of the groups that are here, etc. I think there's another one tomorrow night over at Bethany. And so you

need to hear both sides of it, and we're trying to get this on record for you as well. And at the end of this, we'll probably take questions from maybe two or three people, because our clock is running out on our 1 p.m. time.

If you can leave copies of your testimony.

Do any members have any questions for the Commander? (no response)

I think the law enforcement is very important. I come from law enforcement, and I know I'm getting a lot of law enforcement people calling me with concerns. I know that you have to do your job, one way or another, with or without resources. But I think the impact from a criminal justice perspective, as well as the health care side, is very important, particularly here in New Jersey; as well as the insurance side. There is a liability to this that we don't discuss enough. We're not sure what the liability is. I know that Fidelity -- I think it's Fidelity Insurance -- indicated on the record that they're not going to fund any land deals where you grow this stuff or do things like that, because of the Federal law. And I think Senator Gill was alluding to maybe the conflicts of the two laws.

So I want to thank you again, and I hope your trip home is safe.

And hopefully, we can get you back, because we have some other testimony. People need to hear this stuff up and down the state.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: You know, I just thought about this, and maybe you can clarify it.

As a law enforcement officer, do you fall under different-- Now that it is legal in Vegas, does law enforcement fall under any kind of law or

rule -- I don't know if your union is involved -- that you get tested -- law enforcement officers? Are you guys also -- is there a rule?

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: That's a very good question.

Actually, prior to legalization, we already had mandatory drug testing, random drug testing--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Random.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: --within our organization. The legalization of marijuana has affected our policy.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Okay; so that's what I needed to-- What is that?

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: So what that means is it is still illegal-- Or, I'm sorry; it is still against department policy for employees at Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department to use marijuana. However, what we've had to do is carve out an exception, because it's legal; it's very common that maybe a family member -- or they may go into a home or somewhere else where someone is smoking marijuana. And in the past it was against policy to be around someone who is engaging in illegal drug use. And so the Department has had to modify policy to give an exception for people to be in the presence of someone who is using marijuana.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Now, it stays in your system for, I think, seven days--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Thirty.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Thirty; okay.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: And you do have random testing still?

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: So you test somebody randomly; they come up positive because they were, maybe -- they'll claim they were around somebody who smoked it. How does this -- has this come up? Is that--

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Well, it hasn't yet. But we have discussed the "It was second-hand smoke" defense.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Okay.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: And I guess we'll know the answer to how well that defense holds up. Our policy does say that technically that is not a defense; that if you still test positive you are subject to discipline, including up to termination. However, as we know, that will be litigated by the unions; it will be litigated heavily, because of the impact.

So I don't have an answer for you right now, but it certainly puts us in a quandary.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Thank you.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Any other member?

Assemblywoman, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: No; you answered it -- in reference to second-hand--

SENATOR RICE: He did?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thanks.

CAPTAIN RAYBUCK: Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Okay; next we're going to have Mr. Billy Fusco (indicating pronunciation); is it Fusco? Is that a C?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: I think it's a C.

SENATOR RICE: Fusco?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Is that correct, Billy; is it Fusco or Fucio? (indicating pronunciation)

WILLIAM A. FUSCO: Fusco. (indicating pronunciation)

SENATOR RICE: Because the C looks like an O. Fusco; okay.

MR. FUSCO: Yes.

Good morning, Senator. I would like to thank you; I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is William Fusco, and I am the Executive Director of Dynamic Youth Community. Founded in 1970, it was created to address substance abuse issues affecting adolescents and young adults, and their families.

DYC is a New York state licensed and funded program. We have three facilities: an intensive 86-bed residential program in Fallsburg, New York; an outpatient program in Brooklyn, New York; and a community residence also in Brooklyn, New York. Overall, we serve 350 young people and their families each year.

For over a decade the majority of the young people seeking our help have been addicted to opioids. In our 48-year history, we have remained true to our mission of helping young people be able to live drug-

and alcohol-free. And that has been the mission that has been part of mine, and part of our whole organization.

The next paragraph really talks about some of the committees that I am on, and some of the different committees that I've chaired. I am a very good friend of David Kerr from Integrity House, and serve on the National Committee for Addiction in Washington D.C. with him.

The other part of what I want to say about myself, in particular, is that instead of talking about all my credentials is to talk about the fact that I am very proud to be a graduate of Phoenix House, that I entered at 23 years old, in 1968. Before that, I was bouncing around from jail to jail; my addiction started when I was 12 years old. And I came from a blue collar family; and me, and many people who came out of that, dedicated our lives to trying to help young people be able to get past their early years and be able to live a productive and drug-free life.

Let me just take you a little bit on what we've seen, as far as the opioid epidemic is concerned. Now, in the early 1990s, we started to see a rise in prescription drugs coming into the program. It went from 5 percent, to 10 percent, to 15 percent, to 20 percent. And these kids were severely addicted to drugs; not casual users. This was a serious addiction to drugs.

What I think fueled it was it was a pill; and it was a pill given by a doctor. And it was given as so-called *harmless* in many ways, and that you couldn't get addicted to it. And all the misinformation that was out there about these drugs, and how these drugs, you know, kind of proliferated because they weren't -- they weren't illegal; they weren't part of a-- So as long as you had your bottle of prescribed pills in your pocket, there were no repercussions at all from that.

Now, let me just add to that, as far as we're concerned in Dynamic Youth, we believe that addicts should never be incarcerated; that that is really an injustice to an addict who has a disease. And to do that, you know, it would be like incarcerating somebody with any other disease. By the same token, part of what happened with the availability of these drugs in neighborhoods throughout our whole metropolitan area led to an addicted population of young people. That addicted population of young people, later on, as they tried to squeeze the ability to get prescription drugs -- we also knew that without any treatment involved in it that this would just lead this whole group of people to a black market of drugs; and that is exactly what's happened. It was over \$200 a day to keep a habit of OxyContin; it was \$40 a day to keep a habit of heroin. So many people -- so many young people made that compromise to go from one to the other just simply because of the economics that were going on between the two drugs and how that happened.

Now, how does that refer to anything around marijuana? It's my contention that part of what happens is when the availability and the marketing of these drugs are such that it becomes, as far as young people are concerned -- that it's not that bad a thing, you know, that is part of how these -- how this addiction is fueled.

You know, I've heard a lot of people say, you know, people who wind up addicts come from bad families, broken families; all the rest of that. It's a very arrogant statement because we, who have worked with thousands and thousands of families, know that it comes from all walks of life; every possible walk of life you could think of -- a deacon's son, as well as somebody who grows up in extreme poverty. Same difference. It's

almost as if I wanted to say that some kids love getting high; you know, that sounds, maybe, funny; but that's kind of what starts happening. And when these things happen at 12, and 13, and 14 years old, when these drugs are available to them -- which they are at those ages -- their whole set up is starting to happen. They start living a life of getting high. And from one drug to another, that happens. Now, does that happen to everybody? No; but it happens to plenty of young people. And right now, I just want to say, last year, 32,000 people died of opioid addiction; and we can really trace that opioid addiction back to a drug culture that really has been -- that's proliferated for the last 60 years in the United States.

Over -- 100 percent of the people coming into our program-- Now, let me remind you. In our program, it's a one-year residence; two year after- care. So we follow somebody for a long time and stay with them. In our program, 100 percent of the young people coming into our program have started with marijuana; 100 percent. So to say that there's no correlation between the two would be -- I don't know, something that really defies what the numbers are.

The second part of it is, is that to believe that these drugs are not going to fall into the hands of young people-- Maybe people underestimate how they can get drugs, but I don't. I know that they will fall into the hands -- and the more drugs that are out there, and the more potent the drugs that are out there, young people who have a tendency to want to get high and want to get high more -- and that's what they want to do -- are going to find these drugs and it's going to be part of it.

I've been doing this almost 50 years. I really do this from my own experience more than anything else, and I've learned many, many

things along the way. I just really caution us -- please, remember what's happening to the youth of our country. The biggest skyrocketing of overdoses in opioids right now in New York City is in the Bronx, New York. That's the biggest place where the most overdoses are happening today. So it's in every place across our metropolitan area.

Today I brought with me two members of the program, Alonzo and Lucas. And if you would care, we would love to be able for them to be able to share a word or two about their own experience.

SENATOR RICE: Unfortunately, we're running out of time, so I really can't have that part of the testimony. I apologize, but I have to get three more people on. We were supposed to be out of here at 1:00; we'll probably run a couple of minutes over. I hope the Pastor doesn't mind. Is that okay with you?

MR. FUSCO: Well, Senator--

SENATOR RICE: If you could leave your testimony, I'd appreciate it, okay?

MR. FUSCO: --you know, they really have, I think, you know, very important things to say.

SENATOR RICE: Why don't you take just a minute or two.

A L O N Z O: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

ALONZO: Hi; my name is Alonzo, and I speak on behalf of the Dynamic Youth Community.

And I'm basically-- You know, previous testimony is basically stats and statistical data. And I believe that marijuana is a gateway drug and continue -- will continue drug use. From my past experiences, I started

using marijuana when I was 12 years old, and it was readily available. People -- past testimonies were saying that kids under 21 are not going to be able to use it, and I think that's not true at all.

I think it will be -- I think when you talk about marijuana, it correlates with the degradation of women and degradation of life in general. You know, we have celebrities who glorify it; and it's not conducive -- it's not productive to the community at all.

And that's all I'm going to say. A lot of the testimony was statistical; and I believe that marijuana is not a productive thing to have in a community. It doesn't serve any purpose, except to alter somebody's mind.

MR. FUSCO: Alonzo, could you say what you're doing with your GED?

ALONZO: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: So -- is he going to speak as well (indicating)?

MR. FUSCO: Just for a second.

SENATOR RICE: Take a moment; you did good, okay?

ALONZO: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: You're on the record. Go ahead, since you took the time.

L U C A S: Yes; so I'm Lucas; I'm out here from -- actually I'm from Denver, Colorado. I lived there 24 of the 26 years I've been alive. In 2014, when it got legalized, it kind of became a state that I wouldn't usually call my own because it became overpopulated.

I got into drugs; marijuana was the first drug I experimented with, and that eventually led me into heroin and more drugs. But it did start with weed, and it was always easily accessible where I'm from. It's even more easily accessible now, and I think that is not beneficial for anybody, honestly.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

MR. FUSCO: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: And thank you for understanding my timeframe, okay?

MR. FUSCO: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Next, I'm going to call up two people at the same time, and that is Mr. Luke Niforatos and Will Jones.

And I know that Anthony Menafro is here, and he'll be our last person to testify, okay?

LUKE D. NIFORATOS: Should we just go one at a time?

SENATOR RICE: No, he can come up--

MR. NIFORATOS: Okay.

SENATOR RICE: --and sit there. And then one of you can go, and then the other can go, okay?

MR. NIFORATOS: Okay; thank you.

Well, first of all, my name is Luke Niforatos; and I know my last name is Greek and it's very difficult. So I appreciate you--

But I just wanted to let you all know what an honor it is to be here today. And I just thank you for taking the time to hear both sides of the evidence on this issue and really consider fully the legalization of

marijuana. Because it's a very important decision, and it requires a lot of careful consideration.

So thank you all.

I'm here today just-- I'm the Chief of Staff of SAM -- Smart Approaches to Marijuana. But I have spent 20 years of my life living in Denver, Colorado. I was there before, during, and after legalization; and I really was able to witness, firsthand, the effects of what marijuana legalization did to our state.

I am the husband to a beautiful wife; I am the father to a 15-month-old daughter. And, really, today, I'm not here to tell you what to do; you're the leaders in your state and your communities. You know what your communities need and want. I'm here to just share with you our experience and really what my mission is, which is to ensure that every state in this country hears about what really is going on in Colorado and, hopefully, avoids the mistakes that we made there.

So what we really saw, from the perspective of public health in our state, is that marijuana greatly threatened the public health of our state. We have seen a myriad of effects -- emergency room visits are up 35 percent since legalization. I actually come from a healthcare background; I've worked in hospital systems and nonprofit health clinics in Colorado my entire career. And we saw so many different patients coming in with various issues related to marijuana.

I've actually worked with almost a thousand physicians; and I know, on a firsthand basis, in speaking with them that they would never prescribe marijuana, even for a medical purpose, because they know the

effects of it. So it really is something that we've seen be a negative in our state.

We've also seen use go up. So Colorado is now the number one state in the country for first-time marijuana use among youth. Our youth numbers are continuing to rise. It's something that has us very, very concerned. We've also seen calls to poison control centers go up 210 percent since the legalization.

So, from the public health perspective, there's so much to be concerned about in our state. And I just urge you all to consider that when you think about policies around marijuana legalization.

We also heard, in Colorado, I think one of the things in talking to friends of mine who voted for legalization -- they were sold on this idea that legalizing marijuana was going to bring in tons of money and fix all of our budget issues. But in the years since legalization, the *Denver Post* has reported, the *Colorado Independent* has reported, *Westword* has reported -- all of our major media organizations have reported that these marijuana tax dollars have not solved our budget issues. In fact, in every election since legalization we have been asked to raise taxes for education because education dollars are not showing up. So it was not the silver bullet to our budgetary problems in our state. And really, you know, it's never going to be a silver bullet. I mean, the lottery wasn't the silver bullet, and certainly marijuana legalization will not be the silver bullet.

We also saw the black market continue to grow. Our Attorney General, Cynthia Coffman, told reporters just a couple of years ago that, "Criminals are still selling on the black market; we have plenty of cartel

activity in Colorado and plenty of illegal activity that has not decreased at all.” That is a direct quote.

We have also seen the number of packages sending marijuana to other states dramatically rise over 20 percent since legalization. And in rural areas where it’s really difficult to keep track of illegal marijuana grows, we had a seizure of over \$6.5 million worth of illegal marijuana in Aspen, Colorado alone. So the black market has continued to thrive; we’re continuing to see these problems.

In relation to drugged driving -- traffic fatalities, as a result of marijuana-related car crashes and accidents, have increased by a factor of two; so we have seen two times that number since legalization.

And with regard to the workplace, the largest construction company in Colorado, G E Construction -- the CEO said that they can’t hire anybody from Colorado because they can’t get anyone to pass a drug test. So they’re having to ship labor in from other states. And as decision-makers, you know -- it is best to get jobs in your state, in your hometown; not get people shipped in from other states to take those jobs. Those jobs need to be occupied by the people in your district. So that’s very important to consider when we think about legalizing marijuana.

I want to close just with a story. My wife and I -- we love our home. My wife’s a Denver native; I spent most of my life in Denver. We love our hometown (*sic*) of Colorado. It’s known for its fitness, for its health, for its beauty, its mountains, and its hiking. That’s something that I’ve always loved about being from there, really.

We used to love to take our daughter on walks in her stroller when she was a little baby -- and she is really a little baby; she’s only 15

months, but she's running around now and I feel like I can't keep track of her. But we would take her on walks in her stroller, and we noticed, as time went on, that more and more marijuana smells were in our neighborhood; more and more marijuana smells were downtown. Then we just noticed clouds of marijuana smoke, and my wife kept bringing blankets to cover our stroller so that the smoke wouldn't get in.

And then I did some looking at the numbers, and there are over 1,000 pot dispensaries in Colorado, compared to a combined total of 300 Starbucks and McDonalds combined. So it's three times the-- You know, you look around and you think you see Starbucks everywhere; multiply that by a factor of three, and that's how many pot dispensaries are in Colorado.

So now I kind of want you to close your eyes and imagine, here in New Jersey, a thousand pot dispensaries on almost every corner of your neighborhoods, and the smell that that would generate.

So we experienced that, and we stopped taking our daughter on walks. And my wife would continually lament to me, saying "I want to take our daughter on a walk, but I don't feel safe to do it, and I don't think that it's safe for her lungs."

So that's just the story of our experience. I urge you-- You know, you've heard a lot of statistics today; you've heard some great, great testimonies from people far more qualified than I am on this issue. But coming from somebody who's lived this experience, who's been in Colorado, our voices have been shouted down in that state because a billion-dollar industry is pouring millions of dollars into advertisements and billboards that are much, much louder. And you all know up here, because of the

experiences of your community -- if you have money, you can push any message you want.

And so I thank you for giving a voice to the voiceless here today -- for the people like me who come from a state who are saying, "This is what we're experiencing, but we were shouted down by a multi-billion industry."

So I urge you to fight back against that multi-billion dollar industry here in New Jersey. Your communities have enough to deal with, and I know that you are all fantastic leaders and you're doing a great job giving a voice to your communities.

So thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

The Assemblywoman needs to make an announcement. Her eyes are better than mine; and I'm looking up here, and I see some print. (laughter)

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Yes; if you have a silver BMW X-3, R16 JRJ, please move your car.

SENATOR RICE: Okay, so--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Okay; and also I want to acknowledge Jersey City Council President Rolando Lavarro; please raise your hand back there. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Mr. President. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thanks for coming.

And Assemblywoman Sumter is here now.

SENATOR GILL: Oh, why is she sitting in--

SENATOR RICE: Where is she?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Come on up here.

SENATOR RICE: You better come on up here and show your face -- okay? (laughter) -- as hard as you work.

Okay; we're going to be wrapping up soon, so just bear with us, okay?

I just want to say to you -- I really thank you for taking the time to come. That's what I'm trying to do; that's what we're trying to do in the Black Caucus. We know that there's a community, and it has always been our history here, that gets suppressed -- the voices get suppressed. And that's why I was trying to explain to the people before that we're not trying to ignore the other conversation on the other side as to why we should legalize, in some people's mind. But those conversations are being held every day throughout the state; big money is coming in to make sure they have those hearings. And we need to hear this side too; we don't have the big money to have a lot of hearings, but at least we want this on record. And then we can go back -- once everybody leaves and we finish our hearing in Atlantic City -- into communities to have general conversations from both sides. But this needs to be on record.

With that being said, I'm going to ask Mr. Will Jones to speak next; and I want our last speaker, Mr. Menafro, to be on-deck.

WILLIAM V. JONES III: Thank you very much.

Yes; my name is William Jones; I'm from Washington D.C. I'm a full-time firefighter EMT in Washington D.C.; a third-generation Washingtonian. I care a lot about my community and that's why I work on this issue when I'm not working with the fire department. I love to work on

this issue because it's something that impacts where I live; it's something that impacts my community.

And so I just consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to share some of my research and insight into this very important issue that's facing New Jersey.

Before I begin my brief prepared remarks, I just want to do -- I want everyone here to join me with a quick journey in your minds, real quick. Just imagine -- go in your mind, into your home; walk out the front door of your home, down the street in any direction. What is the closest store to -- what is the closest store that you get to -- the first store that you get to when you walk about the front door of your home and what's the first store that you get to?

We're going to get back to that in a second, but I just wanted you to take that little journey in your mind, hold that thought and I'll get through my remarks and we'll get back to that.

Racial disparities in arrest rates for drugs are a well-documented and lived reality. For decades, drug policy has contributed to skyrocketing incarceration rates among minority populations. However, that marijuana legalization is promoted as a victory for racial justice is ironic at best. Let's just look at marijuana's counterparts, the alcohol and tobacco industries. We hear, all the time that we should regulate marijuana like alcohol. It is an unjustified reality that in many black communities a child cannot take a walk without passing a liquor store on every corner. Research was done at Johns Hopkins that showed, in Baltimore, there are eight times as many liquor stores in minority communities as in other communities.

Back to that little walk I encouraged you to take in your mind to the nearest store.

When I take a walk out the front door of my home to the nearest store in any direction, it's a liquor store. I live in Northeast D.C., right on the border of Southeast D.C., and in any direction the closest store is a liquor store; and if it's not a liquor store, it's a convenience store that's so plastered with advertisements for cigarettes and alcohol that you can't even see through the windows because of the promotion of alcohol and tobacco. Yet we hear that we should regulate marijuana like alcohol.

For people in my community where I come from, that does not sound like a great idea.

Liquor stores in poor, non-white neighborhoods far outnumber those in richer, white counterparts. People tell us we should regulate marijuana like alcohol, and that is truly what scares me. Already the marijuana

industry is comprised almost entirely, as has been discussed already, of white men. It's copying the successful playbook of the alcohol industry.

In Denver, the epicenter of legalized weed, lower income, brown and black neighborhoods are already experiencing this, as we have heard already. And in one minority neighborhood in Denver there's one pot business for every 47 residents.

The increased availability of marijuana in these neighborhoods matters, because while some will argue that marijuana isn't harmful, the science says otherwise. Marijuana users are three times more likely to become addicted to heroin than non-users; the frequent pot use by kids is

correlated with higher possibilities of welfare dependency and permanent IQ loss.

Contrary to the argument that marijuana legalization will promote criminal justice, we have seen that legalization has not produced the reductions in incarceration; and this is hugely important to me. Advocates of legalization often point out how marijuana arrests have plummeted because of legalization, and laud this as a victory for social justice. While the finding itself is true, it is not a victory for social justice for two reasons. This was something that I'm very passionate about -- the campaign to legalize in D.C. said that "legalization ends discrimination." That is a quote from the signs that were plastered over every signpost, every lightpost in D.C. It said legalization ends discrimination.

Let's dig a little deeper and see what happened. There are two main metrics that we can look at when evaluating the impact of the criminal justice system in minority populations. The first is the raw percentage of the prison population that is comprised of minorities, compared to the percentage of the state population that they comprise. So, for example, in Colorado, African Americans make up about 4 percent of the overall population; they make up 12 percent of the overall prison population.

The second is the rate of incarceration of minorities for a particular crime, versus others for doing the same thing. For example, in D.C., you were eight times more likely to be arrested for using marijuana if you were black than if you were white.

In order for legalization to be hailed as having had a positive impact, it should cause a reduction in the minority prison population, as

well as an equalization in racial disparities in marijuana-related arrests. Unfortunately, legalization has done neither. Disturbingly, according to state data -- and I have all the resources and state data cited here in my paper, which I will leave as testimony -- according to state data, in states that have legalized since 2014 -- states that have legalized -- the overall prison population has stayed stable and, in some states like Colorado and Washington D.C., it has risen sharply after years of decline, and is projected to continue to rise with no discernible change in demographics. This is publicly available prison population data.

Only Alaska -- which has the tenth-lowest population of African-Americans, at just 23,263 according to 2010 census data -- that's the only state which has shown a significant reduction in the overall prison population since legalization happened. In Colorado you are still twice as likely to be arrested for marijuana-related violations if you are black than if you are white; in D.C., arrests for marijuana use have tripled; arrests for marijuana possession have tripled; and distribution has doubled since legalization.

However, these stats should not surprise us. After all, if the real issue is systemic injustice -- and I believe that it is -- and discrimination, do we really think that changing a law will change the hearts and practices of discriminatory officers and departments? If prior to legalization a corrupt officer would unfairly incarcerate someone for marijuana, then post-legalization a corrupt officer would find a different excuse and arrest someone for some other trivial matter, perhaps claiming that they have too much marijuana, for example. You're only allowed to have two ounces, so maybe they say you have three; or some other trivial matter, for example,

tail lights. There was a national case that we know about that. Remember why Eric Gardner was killed; it was over cigarettes, a legal drug.

If marijuana was the main tool or the crutch of injustice in the criminal justice system, then it would stand to reason that legalizing would have a major impact on the overall prison population. However, if the main problem is policing practices then, as we are seeing, legalization has no discernible impact. Worse than that, we are seeing that legalization has increased the school-to-prison pipeline for people of color, particularly in Colorado. In the two years after Colorado legalized marijuana, the number of Hispanic and black kids arrested for marijuana-related offenses rose 29 and 58 percent, respectively. And in the same period, it dropped 8 percent for white kids again, while going up 58 percent for people of color.

In schools that had 25 percent or fewer youth of color, there were 313 marijuana-related suspensions, compared to 658 marijuana-related suspensions in schools comprised of populations with 76 percent or more youth of color.

All of this is especially alarming, given that adolescents who smoke marijuana once a week are almost six times more likely than nonsmokers to drop out of school, and over three times less likely to enter college. And my question is, where is the social justice in that?

And more tellingly, in places like Colorado and Washington D.C., where are the protests by mostly white legalization activists now? In D.C., a poll that was taken shortly before we voted for legalization showed that 70 percent of whites were in favor of legalization, versus about 55 percent of blacks in favor of legalization in D.C. The silence of those who most supported legalization in Colorado and D.C. is deafening. Now that

they've pocketed their cash, they seem undisturbed by what happens in non-white communities. Ultimately, legalization only exacerbates social justice issues by prompting well-meaning citizens to think that they have done something for civil rights by voting for pot, instead of actually engaging in the hard work that promotes institutional change.

To continue to legalize and commercialize marijuana is to continue to allow an addictive industry to profit off of minorities and the marginalized. It is time for us to wake up and realize that legalizing marijuana only reinforces and exacerbates the pillars of racial inequality in our country.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Any questions? (no response)

Okay.

Your testimony -- you have copies for us?

MR. JONES: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

We're going to bring up--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Sure; we're going to bring up the Sikh American Veterans Alliance -- the President and Founder, Kamal Singh Kalsi.

SENATOR RICE: And I know Anthony Menafro is on-deck; come on up, Anthony, because we're going to get out of here. These are our last speakers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: And we would also like to acknowledge the Council President of Paterson, Ruby Cotton, who is here.

Council President, please stand.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Council President, how are you doing?

(applause)

And also we have -- Councilman Chris James is here from East Orange.

Chris.

Go ahead; yes--

L T. COL. KAMAL SINGH KALSI, D.O.: Yes, sir.

SENATOR RICE: Mr. Menafro, why don't you speak first; then the Doctor can come back, okay?

ANTHONY MENAFRO: Okay.

Good afternoon. My name is Anthony Menafro; I am the research specialist at Hudson County Coalition, under the parent agency Partners in Prevention, also known as--

SENATOR RICE: Speak a little-- Bring the mike a little closer to you.

MR. MENAFRO: Okay.

I am here on behalf of both Partners in Prevention and the Hudson County Coalition.

The topic of recreational marijuana legalization is a complex issue. It has social justice and personal freedom implications, but is also a public health issue, and should be viewed as such.

After thoughtful consideration, Partners in Prevention adopted the American Society of Addiction Medicine's recommendations on recreational marijuana legalization. ASAM, founded in 1954, is a

professional medical society representing over 5,000 physicians, clinicians, and associated professionals in the field of addiction medicine. In their Public Policy Statement, ASAM found empirical evidence that associates THC with cannabis dependence, especially amongst adolescents that begin before the age of 25.

Long-term effects of marijuana can include, but are not limited to, adverse psychiatric effects and disorders, altered brain development, cognitive impairment, and respiratory symptoms.

An increasingly popular route of administration of THC is through edible products; 45 percent of sales in Colorado are through edible products, which include baked goods, candies, and beverages, which all appeal to teens and children.

Furthermore, it is important to note the relevant statistics specific to New Jersey and Hudson County. In Hudson County, marijuana treatment admissions are second on the list of primary drugs, only after heroin. Hudson County has one of the highest marijuana treatment admissions, at 31.5 percent, compared to New Jersey's 15 percent marijuana admissions.

Even though recreational marijuana use is still illegal, the rate of 30-day use in Hudson County is 5.5 percent for middle schoolers. Upon legalization, these numbers are expected to rise due to the increase of availability and access.

While our agency and coalition feel that personal freedom and social justice issues do need to be addressed, we are also very concerned about unintended consequences of legalization, such as increased traffic

fatalities, increased underage consumption, and foster care issues due to increased access for adults.

Because of these factors and others, ASAM and Partners in Prevention make the following policy recommendations.

We support the decriminalization of marijuana, which reduces the penalties; but we do not recommend the legalization of recreational marijuana.

If New Jersey does choose to legalize recreational use, a variety of public health and safety measures should be implemented to minimize potential harms to vulnerable populations. These include, but are not limited to, requiring that products made available for retail sale be tested for potency and clearly labeled with the THC content; prohibiting the legal sale of marijuana products to anyone younger than age 25; prohibiting marketing and advertising to youth, akin to the current restrictions on tobacco product advertising; ensuring marijuana products are sold in child-proof packaging; earmarking taxes placed on marijuana and marijuana product sales for prevention, treatment, and child protection services; supporting the use of marijuana for medical purposes only when governed by appropriate safety and monitoring regulations. And lastly, we do not support the legalization of synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

ASAM makes the recommendation to not legalize recreational marijuana, understanding that we are still learning about unintended consequences of legalized use and ways to prevent those consequences. Partners in Prevention supports these recommendations made by ASAM, a respected, knowledgeable expert in this arena.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

I also need to recognize my former Chief of Staff -- since he is a Freeholder, and took the time to come -- Rufus Johnson, who is sitting back there.

Rufus. (applause)

Dr. Kalsi.

DR. KALSI: Yes.

Senator, esteemed panel; thank you so much.

I'm a doctor; I'm an ER doctor, and I'm a soldier -- a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army. I've been in 17 years now. I'm also a Co-Chair for Governor Murphy's Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

But today I speak to you as a long-time New Jersey resident; I speak on my own behalf, as a father of two beautiful children.

I want to tell you the boots-on-the-ground story, you know, because I've worked in the ER for over a decade now. When I see drug overdoses, they're heroin, they're opiates, they're alcohol; but they are not marijuana. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: I told you if you want to hear him speak, don't clap. (laughter)

DR. KALSI: Don't clap; please don't clap. (laughter)

I deployed to Afghanistan in 2011; when I got back, a lot of fellow soldiers were stricken with PTSD, depression, anxiety, chronic pain -- lots of bad things. And we, as medical professionals, put my fellow brothers and sisters on opiates, benzodiazepines, antidepressants. Turned these guys into zombies.

And so many of my friends, my fellow soldiers, were on the brink of disaster; suicidal. And they started using marijuana. And this is not just a few separate instances; so many of them got off of their painkillers -- prescription painkillers. So many of them got off of their benzodiazepines and their antidepressants; and now, this day, they're alive and they say, "Marijuana saved my life."

Don't clap. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: You're doing good, Doc.

DR. KALSI: Yes, sir.

So you don't have to take my word for it; you can Google it, you can go to the CDC's website. Marijuana does not kill people; not a single death, all right? You can Google, while you're there, the number of people who have died from Motrin, and Tylenol, and everyday products that you would find in your home. But not a single person has died from a marijuana overdose. And that should make us think.

So I won't take up too much of your time; but please, if you care about veterans and service members, you care about patients, you care about children, please legalize and decriminalize marijuana in the State of New Jersey.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Okay, thank you very much, Doctor.

Let me say this for the record, Doc. Before you probably were born, I was fighting a war in Vietnam.

DR. KALSI: *Oorah*, sir.

SENATOR RICE: So you weren't born, right?

DR. KALSI: I was born in 1976, sir.

SENATOR RICE: Well, you were just getting there; okay.
(laughter)

So I came home in 1970. So the point I'm making is that, from the best I can tell throughout the country, and in New Jersey, there's no debate -- serious debate on whether or not marijuana creates overdose. The debate is the relationship -- and its own addiction or habitual use on the other kinds of medical issues that are being researched. And as you know, as a doctor, not just here in this country, but in other countries, there's good data--

DR. KALSI: Oh, yes.

SENATOR RICE: --to indicate that the brain damage to newborns in Colorado has gone up tremendously. There's, more than likely, just like a cancer, a correlation to that. We know that the number of young people going to emergency rooms in Colorado for -- and we know this for a fact -- for marijuana illnesses -- whether it's vomiting or something else -- has increased tremendously. And you know, in New Jersey, we're trying to depopulate the emergency rooms.

And so there is a correlation relationship to other things -- not the overdose. And that's why when folks started to put the debate of legalizing recreational up with medical, to some degree they are kind of mixing apples with oranges. Those are two separate issues. And it appears as though, when you look at the latest polls here in New Jersey, as well as nationally, the numbers say, in New Jersey, not to really do recreational at this point -- we need to look further and get more information -- but to really pay attention to the medical side.

And as you know, in New Jersey, medical is legal; the problem is that we need to fix it. And I think the Governor is right to have a task force take a look at how we fix that, where we can really control that and get other information.

Also, coming from your background as a doctor, that's an academic aspect of it, is that you know in any research that we do -- and particularly in the medical field, and in the criminal justice field, where I come from -- that we really need longitudinal studies. And there's been no longitudinal study on the recreational use. But if you are going to be honest about it, and if you're reading all the data, and you're tracking this stuff, you know even your own peers in California, and people working in pediatrics, etc., have some real serious concerns, based on what we know in Colorado, because Colorado has four years. It's not longitudinal, but it's significant enough for us to say, "Okay, this is factual; these are indicators that are not so good; we need to pay attention to them. And these are things we know that are foreseeable." Because in the arguments for and against this, the one thing that's not being used is what's foreseeable. And you know, you may not know your physician, but the legal people here know if you go to court and you start to argue cases -- whether it's a case dealing with civil issues, a case dealing with criminal issues, trips and falls -- one argument that's going to come up -- it was foreseeable that that was going to happen. It was foreseeable that if you put razor ribbon on a fence, that some child may climb over so, therefore, you have some liability too.

So the foreseeable piece must become important. And I think from the medical field that the medical physicians have to say, "Look, we know that, to the best of our knowledge, we can't document any serious

and substantial cases on overdoses on marijuana. But it's foreseeable that these other things are going to happen, based on what we know now."

And so while I agree with you that there's no debate there; and I think that the focus from the medical side is where our attention should be right now while we start to pay attention at the indicators and the facts that we know.

And I'm going to-- Because you are the last speaker, I'm going to say this, and let my members close out.

Let me tell you what we do know, since we're talking about foreseeability. What we do know is that all the testimony you've heard -- that the number of students on college campuses throughout the country where they have legalized, in terms of use, has gone up tremendously. We know that. New Jersey is a college state; Newark is a college town; Essex County is a college community; so is Jersey City, and so is New Brunswick, etc. So it's foreseeable -- and we know it's going to happen if we legalize -- the number of college students is going to go up tremendously in this state. And then what we also know -- and this is not for rebuttal; I'm just saying what we know -- what we also know is that there's indication that the number of newborns have gone up tremendously -- substantially in Colorado, and there seems to be a lot of brain damage there that is more or less related.

What we do know is that, in New Jersey, we have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, and we're starting to address that now. Assemblywoman Sumter is going to be on point, doing some things you're going to hear about soon. There's a relationship between a lot

of this stuff as you talk about pregnancies; we talk about just the environment; and stuff we're dealing with in general.

What we do know is that there's been no real serious discussion -- and each state's trying to treat it differently -- on employers' liability. We know Fidelity Insurance, for example, say they're not going to insure land and stuff like that because of the Federal law.

Now, what we do know is that cities like Jersey City, and cities like Newark, New Brunswick, and other cities, are starting to see a renaissance; and it took years, since the riots, for the renaissance to come. But by having the highest foreclosure rate in the country, and in the state, and our cities -- okay? -- that those folks who are looking to take opportunities, who come to our cities, knowing that we already have some issues as it relates to drugs, and crime, etc., but they're willing to invest because they see a renaissance in the future -- may very well back off of this if we legalize this stuff. And we have to pay attention to what takes place with adjacent communities.

And what bothers some of us in the minority community -- and me, particularly, because I come from the Civil Rights movement; but I also come from the segregated South. I lived in the segregated South; I didn't read about it -- and so what bothers me is when folks tell people of color -- black folks and brown people -- that, "You shouldn't be incarcerated; and we will turn you loose if you legalize marijuana." They're implying that if we don't legalize it, that we're going to remain in jail when we shouldn't be in jail. And that's problematic with me, on principle. And I think every black person who's promulgating legalization should be offended by those statements.

But they are also telling us, Doc -- and this should have an impact, or a concern, to you -- that we will get treatment money that we've been arguing for for years. They're talking about opiate money now; but they never talk about the money in our communities. But folks are saying that if we legalize it, they will tax drugs and give us some treatment money.

Let me tell you what they're really saying, because nobody listens to the subliminal messages. They're really saying if you help us create more addicts -- okay? -- we'll provide treatment for them and the ones that you're not getting treatment for, while we can make money over here. (applause)

That's a wrong conversation, whether intended or not. The framer of the message is wrong, and that should be offensive.

And that's why it's important to have your testimony with us today, and the testimony of all the folks who took the time to come to town. Because if, in fact, our colleagues, from the Legislative Black Caucus perspective, will read the testimony from all the hearings we're going to have, and put it down to what people held hearings on every day and are telling people, and that money is behind pushing real heavy to be told -- then, hopefully, there will be a more objective look as to where we should be going. And hopefully the Governor will have a better idea of where we should be going as well. Certainly the members of the Legislative Black Caucus will have a better idea of where we should be going, individually or as a Caucus.

And so with that said, I want to thank all of you for taking the time to be here. I certainly want to thank Pastor Rodriguez, again, and his

parishioners, and Trustee Board -- or whatever he has; his deaconess, or I'm not sure what you have, but -- for allowing us to be here.

And now I'm going to turn it over to our host person, but also the Chair of the Subcommittee.

And before I do that, I want the Vice Chair to say something.

And we're going to then turn it over to Assemblywoman McKnight, after Assemblywoman Sumter raises a question, or makes a comment; and then she'll close out. And I think they may have some questions for you, okay?

Thank you very much, on my behalf.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Thank you.

This is for the Doctor part of your beautiful career.

DR. KALSI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: How long-- Because I just want to clarify, because you're a physician.

DR. KALSI: Yes, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: How long does marijuana stay in your system?

DR. KALSI: So it depends on ingestion. But if you truly want to say how long does the chemical, THC and the CBDs, stay on your body, it actually lives in your hair. It gets expressed into your hair--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Right.

DR. KALSI: -- and that potentially could stay there until you shave. But if you're a Sikh, you don't shave. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Well, my concern -- one of my questions is a previous-- There was another question that I had for law enforcement. You smoke it--

DR. KALSI: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: --or you're in a room that there is that second-hand smoke. My question really is, you know, geared toward that aspect. My concern is if you smoke it, or if you're a police officer, or a bus driver, or you work in that kind of field; or a teacher, or a surgeon, and you smoke it, or you're in an area, how long does that last for?

DR. KALSI: So the effects of smoking marijuana should last just a few hours; probably less than that. It will peak within your system within the hour, and then it will start to decline.

From the edibles -- or actually, it's better described as *ingestibles* -- that stuff will last in your system for about two to five hours; sometimes a little bit longer than that as well. It's dose-dependent as well, you know.

So I, for my toxicology portion of my emergency medicine training, I went to Bellevue. And what we were taught at Bellevue, here in New York City, is that you cannot have any appreciable clinically relevant amounts of marijuana from simply being in a car with somebody who's smoking marijuana. So that shouldn't make you high, if that's your question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: It shouldn't; so what you're telling me is that it should not show up in your bloodwork for seven days -- I mean, after -- on the third day.

DR. KALSI: Correct, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: It should not.

DR. KALSI: It should not. Yes, if you're in car and your buddy is smoking next to you, you should not be able to absorb enough marijuana from that smoke to *pop hot* on a urine drug screen test. And really, if we--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: What if you smoke it; or if you smoke it -- it should not, of you smoke it?

DR. KALSI: Oh, no; if you're smoking the substance, you're definitely going to--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Yes; that's more of my concern. Because my-- You know, the question would be like if it is legalized, Senator -- how long will this, you know-- I have that law enforcement aspect; that is my concern. How do we address it to our county employees who drive machinery that could be a hazard? Or our bus drivers, or our police officers, or our fire fighters? That's where, you know--

DR. KALSI: Yes -- no, that's a really--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Or our surgeons; they work in health care.

DR. KALSI: That's a great concern. That's exactly why I don't drink at work; that's why physicians don't use any illicit substances. You know, I think these types of things can be addressed.

Another good reason why we need to control the adult market is so that adulterants don't get mixed in with marijuana. We see that routinely; we know the DEA inspects marijuana and other substances -- other drugs that are on the street right now, and over half of the substances are currently being adulterated with something else -- something hard. Not to mention the fact that you're actually introducing them to the black

market and the elements that the black market represents. So really, if you want to control good, clean marijuana, you can't do it without legalization and decriminalization.

DR. EVANS: (off mike) I can answer your question about that. I actually wrote a book on--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Sit down! Sit down!

SENATOR RICE: Hang on; hello. We can't -- we finish--
Doctor Evans, hello--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Sit down! Sit down!

DR. EVANS: (off mike) But it's my--

SENATOR RICE: Hang on; no, no. We can't--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Sit down!

SENATOR RICE: We can't -- you can sidebar it. You could answer him--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHAVONDA E. SUMTER (2nd Vice Chair): She's going to speak to you afterwards; once the hearing is done, she will--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Sit down!

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: --she will-- Yes, she will speak with you afterwards; thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Yes, but I have to control the meeting. And the next one who says "sit down," you go out, okay? I want to control the meeting, so they will sidebar that, okay?

All right; I appreciate that, okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you, Senator.

So I am Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, and I want to thank all of you for coming out today.

I will get a copy of the transcripts, because I came up from Trenton; but I am from Paterson, New Jersey.

I share a lot of the concerns regarding health disparities, economic disparities, and criminal justice disparities.

I also work as a behavioral health professional for the past 15 years of my career. While marijuana, in its stand-alone state, is not an end-all drug or substance, there is concern, that I see daily, that it's also paired with another substance. It's never just straight marijuana use; especially in mental health. We also do not maximize the opportunity for the use of medicinal marijuana. So I appreciate the clampdown, because I was around when they told us benzodiazepines could never be used illicitly; that opioids were the wonder drug -- that we did not have to worry about abuse, so hence, we were prescribing.

So now when there is real chronic pain, there's a need for treatment drugs; especially when it comes to cancer treatment agents, because that's another brutal disease that requires some type of substance to support a quality of life.

We really need to consider how we're using our medicinal clinics, which we're not maximizing those uses.

And I apologize for looking at the Doctor here, but we share a kindred spirit, with the ED work and what we see coming in.

The other reality is there are not enough treatment centers for people who are addicted. The next reality is, if you're talking about a

college student and ward use on campuses, that's an economic impact. Because any job you go for, especially in health care, you're doing a drug screen. Law enforcement, you're doing a drug screen. Financial institutions, you're doing a drug screen. Social services, you're doing a drug screen.

So how are we going to make sure that these folks are prepared for the workforce? Are we going to say, "Wait three weeks before you do your drug screen?" Or you get a pass if it's under a certain level? I know, for me, if I need a surgical procedure, I want steady hands. Whether you drank on your way to the ER, I want to make sure that I have someone who has enough conscious level to make sure that they're not performing a procedure on me while not being induced, if you will, with some type of substance -- and that's any substance.

The criminal justice piece -- I believe that we need to work hard at that piece, because when you talk about decriminalization, you talk about expungement; you talk about charges for low-level marijuana offenses. Our municipal courts -- and I've talked to judges at the courts in Paterson -- the charges, and the tickets, and the fines that most people come into the municipal courts with are for having marijuana in their possession; or having recently smoked marijuana, smell like marijuana, been in a room with marijuana. While folks don't believe that that one ticket or that one charge has an impact, I know 40- and 50-year-olds who are fired from their jobs because they have that substance charge that shows up because they never had it expunged.

So again, when we talk about creating a workforce in New Jersey -- an educated workforce, or even mechanical workforce, as you're

operating heavy equipment -- if you have some type of substance in you, that limits your ability to do that job.

So these hearings, for us, were important; and we have two more across the state, to hear from each of you, so as we start hosting hearings in the Statehouse, we have a better sentiment of how New Jerseyans feel on this issue; and we know it's a hot issue. And I thank Senator Rice and the Black Caucus for taking this opportunity to have each of you come to your respective locations to let us know what your feelings are and allow us to process the information. So if you can send your information to us in writing, if you have not already done so, that is critical as we prepare to really talk about a big change in the lifestyles for all of the nine million New Jerseyans.

Thank you, Senator; thank you, Assemblywoman.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: Wow, she closed us out.

(laughter)

It's all good.

Before I close, I just want to, just for the record, acknowledge that we have received written testimonials from the New Jersey United Marijuana Reform and the ACLU of New Jersey. So we have their testimonials, and we will put that into the record.

I want to thank Pastor Joshua; where is the Pastor? Back there.

I want to thank you so much for hosting. And would you like a few words -- would you like to say a few words? (no response)

He's okay. (laughter)

I would like to thank you and your team for hosting us.

And I pray that everyone in this room learned at least three things that you can now take back to your communities. We're here, and we have this online; but we want you to go and sit at your kitchen table; go to the coffee shops; go in your living room; go to parks and begin to talk about what you learned here. You learned some good things, and you learned some bad things; but they're all learnings. I've learned a lot; I'm looking forward to continuing my education before I have to make a decision.

And I just want to announce that we have two more hearings. The next hearing is Tuesday, March 27, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and that will be at the Mount Teman AME Church; that is 160 Madison Avenue in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

And then in April, on April 24, we have another one down in Atlantic City, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the Second Baptist Church.

So please, when you leave here, please begin to educate and talk to your mothers, your fathers, your sisters, your brothers, your children, your grandchildren -- because we are in this together. And without you -- we can't make decisions just *for* you. We want to make decisions *with* you.

So thank you all again; and thanks to our Trenton team for coming down -- coming up-- (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McKNIGHT: --and supporting us.
And just have a blessed day. (applause)

(MEETING CONCLUDED)