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Dear Illinois Lawmaker,

As the CEO of the 16,000 member Christian Medical & Dental Associations, I strongly urge you to vote “no” to HB 1 - legalizing the medical use of cannabis otherwise known as the Compassionate Use of Medical Cannabis Pilot Program Act.

The concept of compassionate, safe or effective medical marijuana is incorrect. Marijuana is regulated as a Schedule I controlled substance in the United States, meaning the drug has a high potential for abuse, no currently accepted medical use in treatment, and a lack of accepted safety even under medical supervision.

HB 1 rejects the FDA approval process and nullifies the Illinois DUI laws. It does not serve the interests of the public’s health to ignore the long established FDA process and expose patients to unsafe and ineffective drug products. Furthermore, it allows a patient to operate a motor vehicle after consuming marijuana. Marijuana impairs cognitive and psychomotor performance. It can slow reaction time, impair motor coordination, limit short-term memory, and make it difficult to concentrate and perform complex tasks. In a study reported by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, even a moderate does of marijuana was shown to impair driving performance.

The Act allows for 2.5 ounces of cannabis every 14 days. Research shows that kids who use marijuana weekly are nearly four times more likely than non-users to report they engage in violent behavior. According to that study, incidences of physically attacking people, stealing and destroying property increased in proportion to the number of days marijuana was smoked in the past year.

Studies show that cannabis worsens the course of schizophrenia spectrum disorders and that adolescents possess a greater risk from cannabis than older patients. There is evidence that cannabis could be an independent risk factor for the further development of psychotic disorders.

It should not be legalized for three reasons:

- Legalization is Unnecessary. There are more effective and safer treatments available. For example: dronabinol (Marinol®) and nabilone (Cesamet®), have known quantity and quality of the active substance in marijuana and are FDA approved for the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting and for AIDS-induced weight loss.
- Legalization is Harmful to Patients. Marijuana can have grave negative health effects, not the least of which is dependence and withdrawal. Research has also shown negative effects on the heart, lungs, central nervous system, mental health, academic performance and daily life. Marijuana exerts a myriad of clinical effects and has the potential for a number of known and unknown drug interactions.
- Legalization is Harmful to Society. Marijuana is a “gateway” drug. It is often combined with alcohol abuse and for many leads to the use of harder drugs. Experience in California and other states show that large numbers of people get prescriptions for medical marijuana under the guise of an illness that they don’t have so that the problems of marijuana use on society are greatly magnified.

Legalization sends the wrong message to society that marijuana is not really harmful and will increase its illicit use. The dangers of legalization far outweigh any minimal benefits.

Respectfully,

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