

# STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

The Minority Leader's Daily Press Clips  
February 11, 2016

## **Baker has info that may give people “pause” on pot legalization**

Opponents of marijuana legalization, including lawmakers and police officials, laid out their case against a ballot question to end the prohibition on marijuana Wednesday, and an administration official pledged that Gov. Charlie Baker will speak out more on the issue.

“It’s our duty and our responsibility as legislators and as opinion leaders to also put forward another side of the argument,” Rep. Timothy Whelan, a retired Massachusetts State Police sergeant, said, noting that pro-legalization groups have already begun to tout the supposed benefits of cannabis legalization.

Jim Gerhardt, vice president of the Colorado Drug Investigators Association, gave a presentation on the effects Colorado has experienced since it legalized adult use of marijuana in 2012.

The Centennial State, he said, has seen increases in adult and youth use of marijuana, the number of hospitalizations associated with marijuana use, and the number of traffic fatalities connected to marijuana use. Stopping the wave of support for legalization, he said, will require lawmakers and cops making their opinions known.

“I think when those of you that are in public safety, those of you that are in government, if you take even a neutral position, the public is looking at that as you must be OK with it,” he said. “Because if you weren’t OK with it you certainly would be coming out against it.”

Jennifer Queally, undersecretary for law enforcement in the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, said Baker “vigorously opposes” full legalization of marijuana and is likely to make his opinion more widely known. “I can also tell you that you will hear more from him on this issue,” she said.

Baker has received information, she said, on the effects of legalization in Colorado that “would or should cause people to pause in this decision to go forward on legalizing this dangerous drug.”

Baker’s press secretary, Lizzy Guyton, said Baker opposes full legalization “due to concerns he shares with health professionals in the addiction community over increased access to the drug.”

A ballot initiative to legalize the adult use of marijuana and establish a regulatory framework appears poised to go to voters in November, backed by the Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol. Marijuana advocates have had marked success taking marijuana reform efforts directly to the voters. Possession of small amounts of pot was decriminalized by voters in 2008 and four years later voters handily approved the medical use of marijuana.

That group pushed back Wednesday against the presenters — all police officials — chosen to brief legislators and staff members on legalization.

“Getting perspective on marijuana prohibition from these career prohibitionists is like getting perspective on veganism from cattle ranchers,” campaign communications director Jim Borghesani said in a statement. “Voters should be disappointed in these legislators. It wouldn’t have required much effort to find more credible presenters than prohibition hardliners who steadfastly ignore legitimate independent research.”

On Wednesday, the Marijuana Policy Project reported that Colorado’s regulated marijuana industry generated more than \$135 million in revenue for the state in 2015, including more than \$35 million for school construction projects, citing figures from the Colorado Department of Revenue.

Gerhardt recounted the efforts of pro-cannabis activists in 2012 to legalize the drug in Colorado, telling lawmakers that activists in Colorado framed the issue by comparing it to alcohol and suggesting that it could be regulated the same way.

“Colorado has given a blueprint to all these national groups now to go forward in this theory of regulate marijuana like alcohol. They’re using the same ads, they’re using the same concepts to try to win over voters everywhere. You’re all doing something very important here today by getting ahead of this and getting your leaders out in front of this.”

Though the sponsors of Wednesday’s briefing — Reps. Whelan, Josh Cutler, Jim Cantwell, Tom Calter, John Rogers, **Mathew Muratore** and **Hannah Kane** — have not yet formed an official coalition to oppose legalization, lawmakers said it is an issue they will be keeping a close eye on throughout the year.

“Marijuana is a gateway drug to the problems of the opioid crisis that we’re having today and to ignore that fact is at our own peril and the peril of our children,” Rep. Harold Naughton said. “This is something we all need to stay on track of and something we all need to work very hard against.”

Naughton, the House chair of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security, said he recently met with a group of police chiefs who “threw their hands up about this ballot initiative in the fall and they said, ‘We know we’re going to lose, we don’t have the organization to beat this.’”

But the air of inevitability around legalization, he said, should not deter people from speaking their minds and working against it.

“I think this can be beaten,” Naughton said. “It’s not just a business and it’s not like a six-pack of beer. There’s a lot more to it.”

-By Colin A. Young, State House News Service