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Taxation and Regulation That Allows for Commercialization Is Not Good Prevention

On April 17, Prevention Works! VT was invited to give testimony to the House Government Operations Committee about S.54, a bill to commercialize marijuana sales in Vermont.

As follow up to that testimony, which emphasized that science and evidence – not special interests or corporations – must drive marijuana policy in Vermont, the group and its members released a statement to clearly refute statements that commercialization of marijuana is needed to provide tax dollars for prevention services.

“It is true that the prevention system in VT is under-funded and lacks necessary resources to implement effective strategies with enough frequency, intensity, and duration to adequately prevent substance abuse in our communities,” said Lori Augustyniak, Coordinator of Prevention Works! VT, “however, **taxation and regulation that allows for commercialization is not good prevention.**”

The statement maintains that important lessons can be learned from two already legal drugs -- alcohol and tobacco -- of how an open market fuel greater harm. Alcohol and tobacco are easy to obtain. Commercialization glamorizes their use and furthers their social acceptance. High profits make aggressive marketing worthwhile for sellers. Addiction is simply the price of doing business.

It further states that evidence demonstrates that without a **strong public health framework** for this work, a wealthy and politically powerful marijuana industry will develop and use its political clout to manipulate regulatory frameworks and thwart public health efforts to reduce use – just like happened with tobacco and alcohol.

“The legislation currently under consideration is not based on successful public health strategies, like tobacco control.” said Kate Nugent, Executive Director of the Winooski Partnership for Prevention, “Any new marijuana laws must not only prevent or delay first use of the drug, **but also reduce consumption by adults and encourage current marijuana users to quit**, just like Vermont’s tobacco control program does.”

The full statement can be found at PreventionWorksVT.org.

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Prevention Works! VT unites coalitions and other substance use service providers across the state to promote and implement prevention strategies that decrease the prevalence of tobacco use, drug use, underage drinking and high-risk drinking in Vermont.