



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Statement from Bishop Robert P. Deeley on Question 1

In November, Maine residents will cast their votes on Question 1, which seeks to decriminalize the recreational use of marijuana. Passage of this referendum would make it legal for your children to possess marijuana, a fact recently confirmed by Maine Attorney General Janet Mills.

In a particularly inflamed political climate, perhaps it is best to use the example of another state that has gone down the path Maine is considering now. Examine the devastating impact felt in Colorado since the commercial sale of marijuana began in January of 2014. A comprehensive report issued last month by the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area states that since marijuana has been legalized, marijuana-related traffic deaths have increased by 62 percent and marijuana-related hospitalizations have increased by over 30 percent.

The use and abuse of marijuana by the youth of Colorado has increased by 20 percent since legalization. The young people in Colorado rank first in the nation for marijuana use, an illegal activity for anyone under the age of 21. It should come as no surprise that expulsion and dropout rates have spiked significantly; family lives have been negatively affected; and anxiety about public safety has risen.

Do we really want to bring these issues to Maine families, schools, and communities?

Marijuana represents a significant part of substance use in America and adversely affects the health of millions of Americans. The widespread use of marijuana, particularly by young people under the age of 18, is steadily increasing while scientific evidence clearly links its long-term damaging effects on brain development. The National Institute on Drug Abuse states: "When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, the drug may reduce thinking, memory, and learning functions and affects how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions. Marijuana's effects on these abilities may last a long time or even be permanent."

Legalizing a drug for recreational use that causes these effects on the human body, particularly our youth, is not a path that civil society should choose to take. Maine is currently waging a losing battle against opioid abuse. Our attention must not be diverted from that health crisis, nor do we want to add fuel to the problem by increasing the number of marijuana users who might one day "graduate" to other illegal/illicit substances. The legalization of marijuana can only serve to worsen this crisis.

The Catholic Church teaches "the use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense." The diocese hopes that voters will listen to doctors, public safety agencies, and substance-abuse professionals who have expressed their opposition to this dangerous prospect.

Legalizing marijuana sends a message to our young people that this recreational drug use is acceptable. I join the Maine Medical Association, the Maine State Chiefs of Police, the Maine Association of School Nurses, the Office of the Attorney General, and many others in opposing the legalization of marijuana. I urge the voters of Maine to vote NO on Question 1 on November 8, 2016.