

High Society – The Fight to Liberate RI



On March 5, Representative Scott Slater and Senator Josh Miller will introduce to the RI legislature a bill to regulate, control and tax marijuana. This is the third consecutive year that such a bill has been introduced in Rhode Island, yet no progress has been made toward ending marijuana prohibition in RI.

This bill is extremely well-thought-out in dealing with the regulation of sales, growing and taxation for a state-run cannabis industry, with a few added details concerning the production of agricultural hemp (included in this year's presentation). The Marijuana Regulation, Control and Taxation Act truly addresses the concerns of all of those who have consistently opposed such legislation due to fears of drug abuse, addiction, driving under the influence and adolescent perception and experimentation in a legal cannabis market.

Most important, I feel, is this last detail concerning RI youth and the message that will be sent to children about cannabis use and how it affects a not yet fully developed brain. This bill not only restricts all advertising, but allocates revenue for treatment, education and media campaigns similar to those used to confront the tobacco and alcohol industries. By properly educating our youth about the realities of cannabis and parental involvement, we can deal a fatal blow to adolescent drug use without penalizing those who are old enough to formulate their own educated opinions and decisions on drug use.

There are also strict limitations and penalties for driving under the influence of marijuana, much like those for alcohol, although these provisions are more difficult to enforce than those associated with alcohol use because those under the influence of marijuana are much more difficult to detect than those under the influence of alcohol. In fact, there have been numerous studies that have proven alcohol to be a much more dangerous and toxic substance than cannabis in any form. Anyone opposed to marijuana legislation because of public safety will feel that this bill takes their concerns into consideration.

Finally, this new bill avoids manipulation of existing medical marijuana legislation; in past bills there

were amendments that put fear into the hearts of those who have invested time, energy and money in adapting these pre-existing laws into their professional and/or personal lives. But it is to these people that this bill may hold the most significance. For without a truly free and legal cannabis market, there will always be manipulation of the existing healthcare system. Hopefully, when legislation to end cannabis prohibition passes, we will start to see healthcare providers and insurance companies take the initiative to offer the same monetary coverage and privileges granted to those who use publicly accepted but more dangerous drugs.

Though this may not be the end-all legislation that every cannabis advocate dreams of, The Marijuana Regulation, Control and Taxation Act is a significant step in the right direction. No, this bill does not answer every concern or satisfy every desire that would be fulfilled in an ideal world, but it does give us a strong foundation to build upon. Hopefully the Rhode Island legislature will take advantage of this opportunity this time around rather than squandering yet another year holding for further study.