



Diocese of Helena

MONTANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



Diocese of Great
Falls-Billings

October 12, 2020

Statement by the Catholic Bishops of Montana on the 2020 Ballot Proposals to Legalize Recreational Marijuana

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Montana oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana as a threat to the flourishing of individual persons — particularly, the young, the poor, and those who struggle with either substance abuse or mental health challenges.

While proponents of legalization see enhanced revenues for the state through a new taxable marijuana industry, we are more concerned with consequences ranging from increased teenage usage, harmful effects on developing brains, addiction, increased impairment-related transportation accidents and deaths, and other potential public health and safety issues.

One only has to look at Colorado to see the devastating impact legalization would have upon our state, particularly our youth. Colorado's decision to legalize marijuana has prompted an increase in marijuana use accompanied by declines in mental and bodily health. Since its decision in 2012 to legalize marijuana, the state has experienced an increase in traffic accidents and deaths and a higher prevalence of marijuana in toxicology screenings of suicides.

Research conducted in Colorado comprises only a small portion of the literature detailing the impact of recreational marijuana across the United States. Publications link marijuana use with cognitive impairment, lung damage and an increased risk of psychotic disorders (among other concerns). Legalization of recreational marijuana will only exacerbate the already serious mental health crisis gripping our state.

Standing together, each of us must commit to building the conditions within society that will make it possible for all people to thrive. In 2014, Pope Francis explained that saying “no” to marijuana and other recreational drugs requires we also ensure all persons have access to those human goods which will allow them to reach their full potential. He said, “... To say this ‘no,’ one has to say ‘yes’ to life, ‘yes’ to love, ‘yes’ to others, ‘yes’ to education, ‘yes’ to greater job opportunities. If we say ‘yes’ to all these things, there will be no room for illicit drugs, for alcohol abuse, for other forms of addiction.”

We pray for those whose lives have been scarred by the scourge of substance abuse and join with state leaders in business, transportation, medicine and law enforcement in urging voters to reject marijuana legalization and vote “NO” on I-190 and CI-118.

Most Reverend Michael W. Warfel
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