

Pastors Warn of New Bill to Legalize Marijuana in Pennsylvania

Several Pennsylvania news outlets have reported that another new bill aiming to legalize marijuana in the Keystone State is making its way through the legislature.

According to Fox 43, House Bill 2050, introduced by State Rep. Jake Wheatley, D-Allegheny, would not only legalize the narcotic but also expunge records for people with nonviolent related offenses.

It's not the first bill of its kind, and it's also not the first time the Pennsylvania Pastors Network (PPN,) has warned of the detrimental effects of legalizing pot in the state.

"As a pastor for more than 45 years and serving a church in Altoona for nearly 25 years, I have seen many people agonize over using and abusing marijuana," said PPN Executive Director Gary Dull. "I believe it is a great mistake to legalize the narcotic for recreational use for several reasons."

First, Dull said, all should consider the impact of marijuana on the physical health of users.

"Studies reveal that even casual marijuana use has very damaging effects on the brain, to the point that it can lead to mental illness," Dull said. "This was the finding of a study conducted by the *Journal of Neuroscience* that should be seriously considered. Frequently, children are even hospitalized due to using marijuana accidentally, which indicates that such exposure has health risks that can be very detrimental."

Secondly, Dull said, the addictive impact of marijuana must

remain a focus.

“As a pastor,” he said, “I make efforts to uphold biblical teaching, and the Bible tells us to avoid anything that may ‘master’ our bodies (1 Cor. 6:12). Most of us know someone who has ruined their life through addictive drugs. Families have been broken, jobs have been lost, and lives have even been taken as a result of the use of addictive drugs. Additionally, most people recognize that marijuana is an ‘entrance or gateway drug’ that has the great potential to lead to more serious drug use and abuse.”

Thirdly, he added, financial impact of legalizing recreational marijuana must be also be considered.

“The more people who get involved with marijuana, the more who will become addicted and the more it will cost the citizens and the government of the commonwealth to rehab those who have become addicted. Already our state has many financial concerns, to which another burden does not need to be added.”

Fourth, Dull continued, an educational impact is also at stake.

“Various studies have shown that students who used marijuana regularly are less likely to finish high school and go on to higher education than those who do not use the drug,” he said. “This results in future generations that may be less educated and unequipped to teach and lead their families to a more educated and higher-quality lifestyle. Less education and a lower-quality lifestyle contribute to many negative elements in society.

“Simply put, legal recreational marijuana is not a good direction for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, due to the many detrimental effects this may have on certain individuals specifically and the population in general,” Dull concluded. “I pray legislators will seriously consider the negative impact of recreational marijuana before they move forward to

legalize such a questionable drug.”

Last year, Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman embarked on a “listening tour” to every Keystone State county to hear what residents thought about legalizing recreational marijuana. He and Gov. Tom Wolf announced the findings in September.

The Pennsylvania Pastors Network, a state chapter of the American Pastors Network, is a group of biblically faithful clergy and church liaisons whose objective is to build a permanent infrastructure of like-minded clergy who affirm the authority of Scripture, take seriously Jesus’ command to be the “salt and light” to the culture, encourage informed Christian thinking about contemporary social issues, examine public policy issues without politicizing their pulpits and engage their congregations in taking part in the political process on a non-partisan basis.

PPN encourages pastors to bring together biblical and constitutional principles in their sermons and provides resources to pastors throughout the state. For more information on PPN, visit its website at [www.pennpastors.org](#) or its Facebook page.