

Written Testimony on

L.D. 1975, "An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs"

**Presented by**

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Committee on Health and Human Services

January 17, 2024

**Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:**

I am a retired Wisconsin Deputy Sheriff with 27 years of full-time experience. 10 years as a patrol officer and 17 years as a K9 handler. I am a certified Drug Recognition Expert, Drug Recognition Expert Instructor. Since my retirement I continue to be active in the Drug Recognition program and now have almost 30 years of experience as a DRE and a Drug Interdiction Instructor.

I have taught in almost every state in our nation, including Puerto Rico. I have flown with the United States Border Patrol and have taught, US Border Patrol, FBI, DEA, US Customs, and countless other law enforcement agencies. I have seen a lot. These opportunities have allowed me to not only speak with law enforcement officers but also offenders.

You can be swayed by a *Recommendation for a Sensible Drug Policy*, unfortunately, the results of that approach are that it will create more drug addicts and keep them trapped in the drug life longer, or worse, result in their own overdose, more harm to your community, victimize more individuals, elevate crimes, increase homelessness, and will have a tragic impact on your state for many years to come.

I can say this not because of statics but because I have taught in states both prior to and then after the decriminalization of drugs. States like Washington and Oregon where drugs have now been decriminalized and have seen firsthand the toll it took on human life and their communities. I have walked the streets of Portland, Seattle, Skid Row in California, and numerous other major metropolitan areas, many where drugs have been decriminalized. These opportunities have allowed me to speak with tens of thousands of drug addicts across the country. There is a common thread among them, drug use is non-discriminatory.

If, in fact, drug use was only for the poor then why is it the rich and famous, the elites, Hollywood stars, famous musicians, NFL, MLB, and NBA players, Professional Wrestlers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, firefighters, police officers, and the list goes on with individuals who lost their lives too early due to substance abuse? Some of whom have been in and out of rehab, some who didn't die on a street corner but in the Beverly Hills Hilton or in a posh mansion.

The bigger problem we face is how we got to where we are and how to solve the problem. Why does a 15-year-old Green Bay, Wisconsin girl get arrested for 1<sup>st</sup> degree intentional homicide for distributing Fentanyl in the Green Bay Schools? How did we get here? If there is no accountability how many more kids would die if she was allowed to stay in school or in the community? She was arrested and is now in custody. She is a danger to others! The United States has approximately 5% of the world population but leads the world in illicit drug use. Yet academically we rank 38<sup>th</sup> in math and 24<sup>th</sup> in science. Again, how did we get here?

There are two avenues that need to take place and one is not even mentioned in the *Recommendation for a Sensible Drug Policy*. The Number one is educational PREVENTION. Why is there not money spent to educate children and young adults on the perils of substance abuse? You may say what about DARE? A course children receive for 1 maybe 2 semesters in elementary school and then nothing else. Unless your community has enacted the New DARE program. Why don't we focus on keeping people off drugs? If there are less people addicted to drugs, then there would be less of a need for treatment. Why isn't vivitrol shots (a once-a-month injectable formulation of naltrexone used to treat opioid dependence) even mentioned as a treatment in the Sensible Drug Policy? Seems like it would be one of the most sensible things to do if you truly want to help addicts become clean and sober, getting them on the road to recovery, not remain in the battle of addiction.

During my career, I mentioned I spoke with tens of thousands of drug addicts, from rich to poor, even doctors -- people from all walks of life and different ethnicities. Another concern is an addict will not get clean until they hit the lowest point of their life. If drugs are decriminalized and housing is provided when will an addict stop? Is it a quality life to be an addict? To not enjoy family, friends' accomplishments, but instead to stay impoverished and a slave to a needle? How are we helping them by providing a place to use illicit substances? Make the substances legal and you are now saying to our youth "Hey, it's ok if you become addicted. We will even provide a place for you to do it, the paraphernalia to go along with it and even a place to live. In other words, you don't have to change your behaviors. I can't believe it's your intention to set people up, young, or old, to such an empty, unfulfilling, painful existence. Because that is what it is to be addicted. People will sell their kids,

their bodies, steal, for the next five-minute high. Criminal empires are built on the illicit drug trade. If you think decriminalizing drugs and decriminalizing drug trafficking will stop the sale you are in for a rude awakening. We can do better and to not do better is also criminal.

Consequentially, have you given thought about the ramifications of decriminalizing drug use and how Operating a Vehicle While Intoxicated will be impacted? You will see more impaired drivers. Be prepared for an increase in motor vehicle property damage crashes, injury crashes, great bodily harm, and fatalities. What if it is your child, your loved one taken from you? Will the defense argue that there should be no accountability since all drugs are decriminalized therefore the most the person should receive is a ticket? Pandora's box will be opened and once it is, like Oregon, which is trying to reverse the decriminalization of drugs making them illegal again, it is hard to go back and close the box back up. If there is no punishment to a crime, no accountability, then why wouldn't people do it?

The answer isn't in providing everything they need to live this lifestyle and to take away every act of holding them responsible, it's to educate, empower them to make better decisions so they can be proud of their achievements, one step at a time, to be contributing members of society.

The possession, the trafficking of illegal substances is not a victimless crime, families who lose loved ones, the fear of the addict hurting someone else, the stress a parent feels and the worry about losing an addicted child and the death and burial of a loved one is the worst thing that can happen in a person's life. The criminal justice system is not perfect, but it does hold people accountable for their actions and can get them into drug court, counseling, and rehab facilities. But to not hold people accountable for crimes will lead to more victims and more crimes. The worst thing the state of Maine can do to all its citizens is to decriminalize drugs. I could have walked away after 27 years of law enforcement and retired and gone fishing but like many officers we genuinely care about people. I have arrested many individuals who later thanked me and told me how that day was the day that changed their life, and they stopped using or selling drugs. In this crazy world we live in doing the right thing is not always the most popular thing.

Thank you for your time.

**-Joe Keil**