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Legalization of Recreational Marijuana in Maryland

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Abstract

Cannabis sativa, better known as marijuana, has been used by humans for centuries. People around the world use this plant for medical, recreational, edible, paper, and agricultural uses. This plant is very valuable because of its many uses and benefits. Many places around the world has legalized the use of this natural substance. For example, the use of marijuana is completely legal in Canada and South Africa. The state of Maryland should legalize the recreational use of this plant for three main reasons: financial gain for the economy, health benefits, and legal stability. The state already has legalized the use of medical marijuana for specific patients. Opposers disagree and state that the legalization of such drug can cause adverse effects and disrupt the legal and financial system currently in place. There are ways to prevent the misuse of marijuana, Maryland lawmakers must create new laws and ramifications to do so.

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Legalization of Recreational Marijuana in Maryland

With its natural appeal and pleasurable high, marijuana is the world's most commonly used illicit substance (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Recreational marijuana should be legalized in Maryland like its medical counterpart. However, opposers will claim legalization of such substance will destroy the system we have in place; therefore, the benefits of legalizing recreational marijuana outweigh the drawbacks. Through detailed investigations, the contributions of marijuana outweigh its disadvantages. Marijuana use for recreational purposes benefits Marylanders three main ways: financial gain for government and the economy, medical and therapeutic benefits, and legislative changes brings stability.

The legalization of recreational Cannabis sativa has been a controversial topic for years. Most users and law makers, understand what it is and how it affects people, however those who are not familiar have no clue of what it is or how it came to be. Marijuana, or Cannabis sativa, is a psychoactive drug from the Cannabis sativa plant used for medical and recreational purposes (Parnes, 2016). It is obtained from dried and crumpled parts of the ubiquitous hemp plant. The plant has three species: Cannabis sativa, Cannabis indica, and Cannabis ruderalis. The plant can grow up to sixteen feet and is easily identified by its thin jagged leaves which range from five to seven fingers. Marijuana has been used for centuries and is one of the oldest psychoactive substances used by man. The first civilizations to cultivate it was China and India. These countries used cannabis for its psychoactive properties, leaves for paper and clothing, and smoke for ceremonial rituals.

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Over the past decade, there has been many legislative changes with regards to marijuana. Currently there are several states with legal medical and recreational marijuana. According to Schuemeyer, the states that have both laws in place are: Alaska, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. Colorado and Washington initiated the legal change with Amendment 64 Initiative 50. They opened the door and helped other states realize marijuana's advantageous potential.

The state of Maryland has recently changed their laws regarding Cannabis sativa. The state signed a bill in 2013 allowing for the medical use of Cannabis sativa to qualifying medical patients. The medical marijuana program became operational on December 1, 2017. According to the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission, to qualify as a medical marijuana patient, you must: be a patient with chronic or debilitating diseases or medical conditions who have been admitted into hospice or receiving palliative care, be a patient with a chronic or debilitating disease whose symptoms include cachexia, anorexia, wasting syndrome, severe or chronic pain, severe nausea, seizures, or persistent muscle pain; and patients who are diagnosed with any condition that is severe for which any medical treatments have been ineffective. Once approved for the medical card, the provider for a patient identifies the amount of dried flower and THC that a patient may purchase in a 30-day period. According to the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission, as of September 24, 2018, there are 61,969 registered patients in the state of Maryland. Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Baltimore County have the highest rates of medical marijuana patients.

In 2014, Governor Martin O'Malley signed a law that decriminalizes the possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana (MMCC, 2018). If a person older than 21, was found with less than 10 grams they may have to pay a fine or attend a drug education program. Repeat offenders

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will have to pay higher fines and or be required to undergo a clinical assessment for substance abuse. Next in 2016, the Maryland General Assembly, passed a law that decriminalizes the possession of marijuana paraphernalia, and smoking marijuana in public. The sale of recreational marijuana is still illegal in Maryland. If a person is caught with less than 50 pounds of marijuana they will be charged with a felony with a penalty of 5 years and or a fine of \$15,000. If a person is caught with more than 50 pounds of marijuana they will be charged with a felony with no less than 40 years. If a person is considered a “drug king pin” they will be charged with trafficking, sentenced to 20-40 years, and/or fined \$1,000,000.

There are so many positive effects of legalizing recreational marijuana. The first main effect of legalizing recreational marijuana is the cease in unwarranted criminal arrest. Statistics in California prove that the number of arrest for illegal possession of illicit drugs has decreased. This in turn causes public safety to be increased due to the decrease in criminal arrest. With the police and drug enforcement agencies having to not worry about marijuana arrest, they now have more time and money to focus on other entities such as heroin and cocaine. The legal system would have less criminals to process and less people in jail for petty crimes such as marijuana possession. “Similarly, areas with large concentrations of African-Americans may have higher arrests rates for marijuana possession than other areas because law enforcement agencies throughout the United States consistently arrest more blacks for marijuana possession than whites” (Gettman, 2009, p. 6).

The legalization of recreational marijuana will be a financial gain for the government and economy. Marijuana is considered a cash crop just the same as tobacco. One of the main benefits would be taxation. Like alcohol and tobacco, marijuana can be grown, monitored, sold, and taxed. The taxes taken from this can be used for schools, parks, recreation, social services, public

transportation, public safety, roadwork, and so much more. The state of California has shown that their revenue was raised by billions by legalizing marijuana. California has had a total of 2.75 billion dollars in sales last year from recreational marijuana (DePietro, 2018). If Maryland would legalize recreational marijuana they would most likely gain more income from weed enthusiast tourist: like those visitors wanting to go to Amsterdam. Also, with the legalization of marijuana comes the job market expansion. There will be more jobs available due to the demand of the product. Jobs positions can range from growers, distributors, marketing, advertising, transport, security, construction, law, finance, and retail.

As controversial as it may be, marijuana is undeniably beneficial in the medical and therapeutic fields. It has been used for centuries to improve the quality of life. Marijuana has and is currently used to treat ailments such as: epilepsy, seizure disorders, cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, Glaucoma, HIV/AIDS, Neurodegenerative Disease, pain, nausea, Cachexia, Wasting Syndrome, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Arthritis, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Insomnia, and so much more. Colorado passed legislation permitting medical use of marijuana for individuals with certain medical conditions back in 2000. (Schuemeyer et al., 2014) Marijuana helps patients most effectively through medical testing, allowing patients to know and understand exactly what psychoactive compounds are being consumed. This allows patients to know which strains contain what cannabinoids and terpenes, how to properly dose, and what strains are most beneficial to their case.

The opposers will claim that recreational legalization of such substance will destroy the system we have in place. The legalization of marijuana can cause negative effects with its users. For example, users can experience the following: anxiety, fear, panic, impaired memory and judgement, impaired coordination, increased risky behavior, and increased risks of accidents

while driving. These side effects are like the side effects of prescription drugs. Although marijuana can be healthy for users, it could possibly have adverse side effects. This is what the government and opposers are concerned with.

The legalization of marijuana can make it more accessible to adolescents. According to Gettman, thirty percent of marijuana users in Maryland were males age 15 to 19. The youth would have easier access to the drug since it would be available throughout the state. Drug use on adolescents can affect them in the long run. Continuous drug use can affect the brain, lungs, and mood. This in turn, can cause drug dependence. “Regular marijuana use in adolescents has been linked to cognitive impairments and brain development deficiencies, which may influence IQ declines. Frequent adolescent marijuana use is also correlated with lower grades, increased school drop-out rates, delinquency, and lower educational and vocational goals” (Parnes, 2016). However, there are no extreme side effects and no correlation with death.

There are no adequate parameters the federal government can use to police marijuana usage. It would be extremely difficult to regulate and enforce the law. Marijuana is not like alcohol in which it's usage can be easily identified through physical attributions. For example, an impaired alcohol user can be identified by slurred speech, red eyes, dilated pupil, slowed reaction time, alcohol smell, etc. Marijuana is typically associated with the strong odor, and dilated pupils. If those two signs are not present, then you cannot typically detect the use of marijuana.

Efforts have been made to change the illegal status of cannabis here in Maryland. There are so many opinions on marijuana and that is why it has been extremely difficult to nationally legalize its recreational and medical use. Maryland needs to recognize that legalizing marijuana can potentially expand and develop their economy by millions. School systems, healthcare, and law enforcement will greatly appreciate the new revenue. Marijuana is a cash crop and not only

provides recreational and medical use but serves in the paper and clothing industries as well. Legalizing recreational marijuana will provide opportunities for marijuana possession offenders to clear their record and have a better chance at employment. Opposers trust it can be detrimental to the youth and difficult to enforce. However, just like alcohol and tobacco, there are ways to ensure the safety of the public. There are instant drug test and physical test that would allow for law enforcement to secure the public. Thus, Maryland should legalize recreational marijuana and decriminalize marijuana possession.

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