

Office of the Bishop

DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

2500 North Tyler Street • P.O. Box 7565 • Little Rock, Arkansas 72217 • (501) 664-0340 Fax (501) 664-6304

A STATEMENT OF THE DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK OPPOSING THE LEGALIZATION OF RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

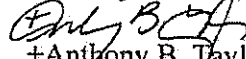
When in 2016 the issue of medical marijuana was before the voters, I noted as part of my Faithful Citizenship letter that medical marijuana and recreational marijuana should be treated differently in matters of public policy. From a theological standpoint the Church has no moral objection to the medical use of marijuana, just like any other drug, when used for a genuine medical purpose. But I also warned that as a practical matter it would be very important—and difficult—to put safeguards in place to prevent it from falling into non-medical hands—especially the youth whose brains are still developing. So I noted that voters had a prudential decision to make regarding the legalization of the use of marijuana for a genuine medical purpose.

Legalization of the recreational use of marijuana, on the other hand, would be a disaster for our state. Scientific evidence has linked marijuana to long-term damaging effects on brain development.¹ *“When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, the drug may reduce thinking, memory and learning functions and affect how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions. Marijuana’s effects on these abilities may last a long time or even be permanent.”*²

One need only examine the impact of recreational marijuana in Colorado since 2013 to fully grasp what would be in store in Arkansas. A 2021 comprehensive report³ issued by the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program states that since recreational marijuana was legalized, traffic deaths in which drivers tested positive for marijuana increased 138%, while all traffic deaths increased 29%. And the percentage of marijuana-related traffic deaths increased from 11% in 2013 to 20% in 2020. Moreover, marijuana use by Colorado youth increased 20% in the first 3 years of its legalization there, and their youth marijuana use remains much higher than the national average. Marijuana use negatively affects youths’ family life, social life, and school performance. Do we really want to bring these all these social impacts to Arkansas?

Legalizing a drug for recreational use that causes these effects on the human body, particularly our youth, is not a path civil society should choose to take. The Catholic Church teaches *“the use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense.”*⁴ Therefore, the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock opposes the legalization of recreational marijuana in Arkansas.

Sincerely in Christ,


+Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock

September 29, 2022

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Drug facts: Marijuana*, Revised December 2019.

² Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ). *Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2015. HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50, p. 3.

³ Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, *The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado. The Impact*, Volume 8, September 2021.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2291