

## **CMA Marijuana Usage White Paper**

- The Cayman Ministers Association (CMA) is committed to the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health of the people of the Cayman Islands, and firmly oppose any efforts toward the legalization or decriminalization of marijuana, due to the far-reaching negative consequences associated with its use.
- We unequivocally oppose the legalization or decriminalization of marijuana, recognizing its profound societal and health impacts. We present these points to safeguard the wellbeing of the people of the Cayman Islands.
- While we recognize the concern related to jailing persons, especially youth, for long periods of time for such infractions, we strongly believe that the answer **IS NOT** in legalizing or decriminalizing harmful substances.
- While recognizing that certain limited medical applications of marijuana may have benefits under stringent regulation, we maintain that these should not be allowed to become a gateway to a broader acceptance of marijuana use—thus creating a slippery slope that we may never recover from.
- We are especially concerned that vulnerable groups such as children, youth, single mothers, and low-income families will bear the brunt of the negative consequences of marijuana legalization or decriminalization, exacerbating existing challenges and vulnerabilities.
- It is important to preserve the Cayman Islands' societal fabric and tourism sector from the detrimental effects of public marijuana use. Public nuisances in neighborhoods, resorts, caves, and beaches would tarnish the image of the islands. This would go against the safe and family friendly international image that the Cayman Islands are famous for.
- We must be mindful of the “slippery slope” that will lead to a variety of dangerous outcomes. We have observed the dangerous international trends that lead to the legalization of other dangerous drugs such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin under the guise of combating drug abuse. One jurisdiction in which this has been observed is Canada.
- Decriminalization is effectively a step toward legalization, as it removes significant legal consequences, and normalizes the use of the substance in society. While labeled differently, decriminalization often creates similar outcomes by reducing the deterrents that keep usage and distribution in check.

- Drawing specific attention to the Christian Heritage of the Cayman Islands that is enshrined in the Preamble and Section (1) of the Cayman Islands Constitution (2009), which acknowledges the importance of upholding “traditional Christian values” that “shaped their history and made them what they are...”; we hold that decriminalization of “small amounts” marijuana is a direct contradiction of this enshrined value.

## **Concerns:**

### **Health Risks:**

- Smoking marijuana has undeniable medical consequences, particularly for youth.
- Long-term mental health consequences include increased depression, anxiety, and impaired brain development.
- Marijuana use is linked to higher addiction rates and significant risks for vulnerable populations, such as adolescents and pregnant women.
- Marijuana use is associated with numerous health risks, including respiratory problems, impaired cognitive function, and an increased risk of psychosis. These risks are especially severe for vulnerable populations such as adolescents, pregnant women, and individuals with mental health disorders. Addressing these challenges places additional strain on families, hospitals, and other institutions, many of which are already operating under significant resource limitations.

### **Societal Impact:**

- Legalization would disproportionately harm lower-income families and single-parent households, which are already challenged, and will increase familial and societal burdens.
- Parents will face greater challenges in raising their children, as the increased accessibility and legalization of marijuana make it harder to prevent drug use among youth. Furthermore, a parents’ ability to provide effective care may be impaired if they themselves are under the influence of the drug.
- Even with strict laws, designed to prohibit minors from accessing these drugs, their availability to young people will inevitably increase, as evidenced by the accessibility of other substances like alcohol and cigarettes, despite similar legal restrictions. Currently, marijuana is illegal, yet many of our youth already have increasing access to it.

- Smaller children exposed to adults using marijuana may experience negative impacts on their physical, mental, and emotional development.
- Most concerning is the link between marijuana use and teen suicide. Colorado state statistics reveal that marijuana was found in the system of approximately 42% of teens who died by suicide—a rate nearly double that of alcohol and four times higher than any other substance. Notably, Colorado consistently ranks among the states in the USA with the highest suicide rates.

### **Public Concerns:**

- Public nuisance issues, including widespread public smoking, would degrade the quality of life for residents and tourists alike. This was observed several times in recent years, in which several social media posts by tourists indicated disappointment due to the constant smell of marijuana usage on 7 Mile Beach.
- There are significant concerns about a lack of enforcement, as evidenced by the ease with which marijuana use can be observed in public spaces. For instance, a brief visit to many local beaches, popular locations or events often reveals the pervasive smell of marijuana, highlighting the challenges in maintaining strict regulations.
- Marijuana is a gateway drug, with evidence from other countries showing subsequent legalization of more dangerous substances.
- Smoking marijuana is often considered a gateway to the use of other, more dangerous drugs. This concern is exemplified by cases like Canada, where early legalization of cannabis has coincided with the subsequent legalization of substances such as cocaine and heroin, intended as measures to address escalating drug-related issues. These developments illustrate how the decriminalization or legalization of marijuana can act as a slippery slope, potentially leading to broader societal challenges and compounded public health crises.

### **Moral and Ethical Concerns:**

- Marijuana usage is currently illegal in the Cayman Islands. When someone smokes Marijuana that person intends to get high. This poses many potential dangers to the safety of an individual and society in general.
- Legalizing marijuana sends a dangerous message that drug use is acceptable, undermining efforts to promote healthy, responsible living.

- Parenting challenges—particularly for single-parent households—would intensify as marijuana becomes more accessible.

### **Economic and Legal Considerations:**

- The Cayman Islands Government recently strengthened DUI (Driving Under the Influence) laws in recognition of the serious risks impaired driving poses to public safety. Increased road risks from marijuana-impaired drivers would counteract recent efforts to strengthen DUI laws.
- Introducing the legal use of marijuana would further exacerbate road safety, as studies indicate that 20 to 30 percent of crashes involving marijuana are directly linked to its usage. Research also shows that driving under the influence of marijuana increases crash risk by 22 percent.
- Law enforcement would face significant challenges in effectively detecting and addressing marijuana intoxication, further complicating efforts to ensure road safety.
- Marijuana use can increase risks for Law Enforcement and Medical Personnel during interactions with individuals having impaired judgment, causing erratic or aggressive behavior, slowing reaction times, and compromising communication. These factors make situations more unpredictable and potentially volatile, emphasizing the need for specialized training for law enforcement to handle such encounters safely.
- The costs of regulating and managing a legal marijuana industry far outweigh any perceived benefits, particularly in a high-cost-of-living region like the Cayman Islands.
- Legalization, or even decriminalization, would place additional strain on law enforcement and public health systems, which are already stretched thin.

### **Summary:**

While the decriminalization of marijuana is often promoted as a way to reduce crime and incarceration rates, it fails to address the broader issues it inevitably introduces. Decriminalization or legalization invariably leads to increased usage and access, resulting in a rise in crime, physical health, mental health, and behavioral problems, as well as greater societal burdens.

Relaxing marijuana laws will potentially reduce non-violent incarcerations while encouraging experimentation, and create far more societal challenges. There is no need to change the law to assess its impact; the consequences are already visible in communities where marijuana use is prevalent and in countries that have

experienced significant issues after legalization, prompting some to tighten their laws again.

Authorities such as the National Drug Council, Department of Family Affairs, healthcare professionals, and local pastors, who have firsthand experience with the adverse effects of marijuana, have historically opposed its use. While the CMA cannot speak on behalf of these organizations, our collective experiences reinforce the stance that decriminalization or legalization is not a wise or beneficial choice for society.

As Pastors who love the Cayman Islands and its people, we feel that we have a responsibility to the people of the Cayman Islands to stand against the use of marijuana, despite the voices of those who see no harm in its use and advocate for its legalization. Our duty is to prioritize the well-being of our society over the push for normalization of such substances.

### **CMA's Recommendations:**

#### **Illegal Marijuana:**

1. Marijuana should remain illegal due to its harmful effects on individuals and society. The law should remain a strong deterrent for those seeking to use marijuana, reinforcing the message that its use is harmful and not aligned with the best interests of individuals or society.
2. If the goal of the Government is to reduce the number of persons jailed who are arrested with a small amount of marijuana, then fines could be imposed. Impose **significant** fines for possession of small amounts of marijuana as an alternative to jail time, addressing infractions without imposing severe penalties on individuals for isolated incidents. Similar to traffic offenses, repeated violations could result in escalated consequences, including the possibility of incarceration.
3. Amnesty bins can be used to allow individuals to anonymously dispose of illegal substances, including marijuana, without fear of legal consequences—especially in the airports, where they can serve an additional purpose by enabling tourists to safely discard marijuana or other prohibited substances as they enter the country from places where marijuana use may be legally acceptable. This helps to maintain a positive tourism experience and prevents legal or logistical issues during security checks. This approach supports harm reduction and promotes public safety in both local and tourism contexts.

This option achieves several key objectives:

- It helps restrict access to a drug that poses significant harm to youth and society.
- It acts as a deterrent, while enabling law enforcement to address public nuisances affecting both residents and tourists.
- It prevents individuals from receiving criminal records or incarceration for possession of small quantities.
- It maintains a deterrent effect for those who intentionally violate the law.
- It mitigates negative consequences for employment opportunities and travel.

*However, it is important to note that any relaxation of these laws is likely to lead to an increase in marijuana use and the associated societal issues.*

### **CBD Products:**

THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) is the primary psychoactive compound in the cannabis plant. It is the chemical responsible for most of marijuana's psychological effects, producing the "high" that users experience. CBD products with no THC should be regulated and allowed under strict guidelines to prevent misuse and ensure public safety. Whilst CBD products have some potential harm according to the FDA\*\* and other sources, with proper regulations and limitations certain health products and cosmetics can be developed, researched, legally imported and distributed.

### **Final Thoughts:**

It is imperative that we, as a nation, prioritize the health and integrity of society over short-term solutions or perceived economic benefits. Marijuana legislation would only create deeper societal and moral challenges, and we strongly caution against taking such steps.

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- <https://colsoncenter.org/breakpoint/the-pot-experiment-has-been-a-disaster>

## Additional Resources:

- <https://www.government.nl/topics/drugs>
- <https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2020/01/netherlands-narco-state/>
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