

GRASS IS NOT GREENER

by Jeff Hunt, Vice President of Public Policy at Colorado Christian University.

Last year, Senator Cory Booker, (D-NJ), introduced the Marijuana Justice Act in an effort to legalize marijuana across the nation and penalize local communities that want nothing to do with this dangerous drug. This far-reaching marijuana legalization marks another sad moment in our nation's embrace of a powerful drug that will have generational consequences.

Our country is facing a drug epidemic. Legalizing recreational marijuana will not do what Senator Booker expects. We heard many of these same promises in 2012 when our state legalized recreational marijuana.

In the years since, Colorado has seen an increase in marijuana related traffic deaths, poison control calls, and emergency room visits. Contrary to predictions, the marijuana black market has increased, not decreased. Numerous state marijuana regulators have been indicted for corruption.

In 2012, we were promised that funds from marijuana taxes would benefit our communities, particularly schools. Dr. Harry Bull, the Superintendent of Cherry Creek Schools, one of the largest school districts in the state, said, "So far, the only thing that the legalization of marijuana has

brought to our schools has been marijuana."

In fiscal year 2016, marijuana tax revenue resulted in \$156,701,018. The total tax revenue for Colorado was \$13,327,123,798, making marijuana only 1.18 percent of the state's total tax revenue. The cost of marijuana legalization in public awareness campaigns, law enforcement, healthcare treatment, addiction recovery, and preventative work is an unknown cost.

Senator Booker stated his reason for legalizing marijuana is to reduce "marijuana arrests happening so much in our country, targeting certain communities — poor communities, minority communities." It's a noble cause to seek to reduce incarceration rates among these communities, but legalizing marijuana has had the opposite effect.

According to the Colorado Department of Public Safety, arrests in Colorado of black and Latino youth for marijuana possession have increased 58 percent and 29 percent respectively after legalization. More black and Latino youth are being arrested for marijuana possession after it became legal than beforehand.

A vast majority of Colorado's marijuana businesses are concentrated in neighborhoods of color. Leaders from these communities, many of whom initially voted to legalize recreational marijuana, often speak about the negative impact of these new businesses. Senator Booker released his bill just a few days after the *Washington Post* reported on a

study by the Review of Economic Studies that found "college students with access to recreational cannabis on average earn worse grades and fail classes at a higher rate." Getting off marijuana especially helped lower performing students who were at risk of dropping out. Since legalizing marijuana, Colorado's youth marijuana use rate is the highest in the nation, 74 percent higher than the national average, according to



the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Report. Legal marijuana has terribly negative effects on the education of our youth.

If Senator Booker is interested in serving poor and minority communities, legalizing marijuana is one of the worst decisions. There is much work to be done to reduce incarceration and recidivism, but flooding communities with more drugs will do nothing but exacerbate the problems.

The true impact of marijuana on our communities is just starting to be learned. The negative consequences of legalizing recreational marijuana will be felt for generations. I encourage Senator Booker to spend time with parents, educators, law enforcement, counselors, community leaders, pastors, and legislators before rushing to legalize marijuana nationally. We have seen the effects in our neighborhoods in Colorado, and we do not wish these problems upon the nation. 

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