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March 14, 2006

# Twenty-Five Year Longitudinal Study Affirms Link Between Marijuana Use and Other Illicit Drug Use

Dear Colleague:

I write to draw your attention to the most recent research demonstrating the fact that ***marijuana is a gateway drug***.

Research[1] from the long-running Christchurch Health and Development Study at Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences[2] shows that regular or heavy marijuana use was associated with using a wider variety of other illicit drugs, and with abuse or dependence on other illicit drugs.

This new research found that "following tight statistical controls, ***there is a clear tendency for those using cannabis to have higher rates of usage of other illicit drugs. This tendency is most evident for regular users of cannabis, and is even more marked in adolescents than in young adults***."[3]

This is further confirmation of what we have long known: that marijuana use opens the door to additional illicit drug use and abuse. Far from being a "benign" substance, marijuana it is a dangerous, addictive drug that is frequently the first step into the abyss of lifelong drug addiction, especially for adolescents.

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[1] D. Fergusson, et al., *Cannabis Use and Other Illicit Drug Use: Testing the Cannabis Gateway Hypothesis*, Addiction Vol. 101 at 556 (April 2006). Abstract available at http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2005.01322.x (last visited March 14, 2006).

[2] Funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, a 25-year longitudinal study of the health, development and adjustment of a birth cohort of 1265 New Zealand children, was the basis for these findings.

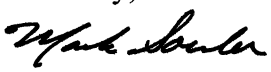
[3] Press Release, "Illicit Drug Use Starts With Cannabis," March 14, 2006, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Otago. *At* http://www.chmeds.ac.nz/newsevents/illicit_drugs.htm (last visited March 14, 2006).

Marijuana is currently the most widely-abused drug in this country.[4] It is linked to serious, dangerous physical and mental side effects including increased risk of heart disease, lung cancer, bronchitis, emphysema, depression, schizophrenia, and thoughts of suicide.[5] Comprised of nearly 400 chemicals, marijuana can affect almost every organ in the human body, from the central nervous system to the cardiovascular, endocrine, respiratory/pulmonary, and immune systems.[6]

Moreover, as we have long known, early exposure to marijuana is linked to the likelihood of lifetime subsequent drug problems.[7] The Christchurch findings confirm this, demonstrating that regular or heavy marijuana use was associated with using a wider variety of other illicit drugs, and with abuse or dependence on other illicit drugs.[8]

I urge you to keep this science-based research in mind in the face of continuous, irresponsible, deceptive, fraudulent, unfounded and reckless claims by proponents of marijuana legalization that it is "safe" or "therapeutic."

Sincerely,



Mark E. Souder
Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice,
Drug Policy and Human Resources
Government Reform Committee

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[4] *NIDA InfoFacts: Marijuana*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, *at* http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/marijuana.html (last visited March 14, 2006).
[5] Letter from John P. Walters, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy, and Karen P. Tandy, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration, to Hon. Frank Wolf, Chairman, Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice and Commerce, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations (June 7, 2005) (on file with the Subcommittee).
[6] Marijuana and Medicine: The Need for a Science Based Approach: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Committee on Government Reform, 108th Cong. (2004) (statement of Nora D. Volkow, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse).
[7] *Id.*
[8] *See* Fergusson, et al., note 1.