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## **A STATEMENT OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MASSACHUSETTS ON THE LEGALIZATION OF RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA**

Marijuana represents a significant part of substance use in America and adversely affects the health of millions of Americans. According to a recent report<sup>1</sup> issued by the National Institute of Drug Abuse, Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Its widespread use and abuse, particularly by young people under the age of eighteen, is steadily increasing while scientific evidence clearly links its long term damaging effects on brain development. “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.”<sup>3</sup>

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. It has been well documented in Massachusetts and across the country that the nation is currently waging a losing battle against opioid abuse. Our attention must not be diverted from that health crisis, nor do we want to add fuel to it by contributing to the risks for the use of other illegal/illicit/proscribed substances through the legalization of marijuana. The availability of marijuana for adolescent users already constitutes an environmental factor for the later use of other illicit drugs.<sup>4</sup> Its legalization will only serve to worsen this problem.

One only has to examine the devastating impact felt in Colorado since 2013, when recreational use of marijuana was legalized, to fully grasp what would be in store in Massachusetts. A comprehensive report<sup>5</sup> issued last month by the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area states that, since marijuana has been legalized, traffic deaths have increased by 48 percent. Recent statistics show that of all traffic deaths in Colorado, 21 percent of those individuals killed tested positive for marijuana. Marijuana related hospitalizations in Colorado have doubled from 2011 to 2014.

Marijuana use and abuse by the youth of Colorado has increased by 20 percent since legalization. Young people in Colorado rank first in the nation for marijuana use – an illegal activity for anyone under the age of 21. Strikingly, this has negatively affected their family life,

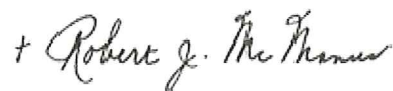
social life and school performance where expulsions and drop-out rates have spiked significantly. Do we really want to bring these issues to Massachusetts?

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.”<sup>6</sup>

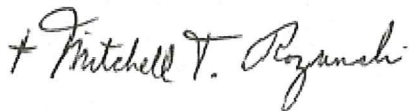
The Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts join Governor Baker and many other elected officials along with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American College of Pediatricians (ACP) in opposing the legalization of marijuana. We urge the voters of Massachusetts to vote NO on Question 4 on November 8, 2016.



His Eminence Seán P. O'Malley, OFM, Cap.  
Archbishop of Boston



Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester



Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski  
Bishop of Springfield



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV  
Bishop of Fall River

1) National Institute on Drug Addiction, Drug facts: Marijuana, Revised March, 2016

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.

3) Ibid p. 3

4) See, for example, Andrew R. Morral, Daniel F. McCaffrey, and Susan M. Paddock, “Reassessing the Marijuana Gateway Effect,” *Addiction* 97, 12 (December 2002):1493-504. People addicted to marijuana are three times more likely to be addicted to heroin; see <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heroin/index.html>.

5) Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, *The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado, The Impact*, Volume 4, September 2016.

6) Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2291)