

My name is Adam Berkey. I thank you in advance for taking the time to read my testimony. It is my intention in writing this letter to humanize the people of our state and country who use cannabis on a regular basis.

I am a 5th Grade teacher in Juneau, AK. Every year I work with the Juneau Police Department to teach DARE to elementary school children. I have done this for six years now, sometimes speaking at the graduation to children about the importance of sobriety for young minds. However, there has always been a problem when I speak to parents and children about this topic. Why? Well, besides being a teacher, a husband, a brother, a son, and a community volunteer, I am also a stoner. I smoke cannabis every night to help control my seizures. To put it bluntly, if I didn't use cannabis, I would be flopping around on the floor in front of my students.

Now, the immediate response to my words is "Marijuana is already legal for medical use. What's the problem?" The problem is that as long as marijuana remains illegal, there is a stigma that sticks to marijuana - the stigma being that everyone who uses marijuana is a criminal, therefore people who use marijuana are bad. This idea has caused me to live dual lives as an individual - By day I am Adam Berkey elementary school teacher, by night I a cannabis consumer. The only thing that I am, always, is scared that someday my private life will become exposed and I will lose my public life. While this fear has been constant for six years, I've now come to a point in which I can no longer lie about who or what I am. I am Adam Berkey, an elementary school teacher and a stoner.

My fear does not end with me. It is also my fear that marijuana will continue to be used as a way to imprison certain people who, outside of marijuana use, break no laws and harm no one. This behavior of imprisoning people for personal choices is against the design of our country - Our country is one that boasts freedom; Our state is one that guarantees privacy. It is freedom and privacy that make our state and country great. Why should our ends be any different on the topic of marijuana than they are on alcohol or guns or raising children or any other rights we take for granted? We only legislate the habits of people when harm is involved. We have legislated marijuana for over 80 years, and we have yet to prove the harm of the drug. Meanwhile, we turn our heads and ignore young people in Alaska who drink themselves to death year after year after year. What message rests in that thinking? We find it normal that teenagers experiment with tobacco. We find it normal that teenagers will try alcohol. We arrest teenagers who get caught trying marijuana. We strip the teenagers of the sports they play. We kick them out of school. We make a lesson out of them - don't be a teenager who uses marijuana, or else....

Well, I am an adult who uses marijuana, and I'm a damn fine adult. I'm a good husband. I'm a good son. I'm a good teacher. I'm a good volunteer. Somehow, though I've used marijuana for a decade, I still have managed to be a good and intelligent human being. Somehow, though smoking marijuana throughout my Masters program, I still managed to get my degree. It is my guess that there are many more people like me hiding their lives from their friends and neighbors, fearing that they might be branded a stoner and good-for-nothing. Nobody should have to live that way. Living in fear is counter-intuitive to what it means to be an American.

The laws that govern marijuana have given me nothing more than shame and anguish, and they need to be done away with. If you can't do that for me, do it for every single young person who

will have their lives destroyed, not from using marijuana, but from the punishments that come along with getting caught with marijuana. This draconian way of dealing with certain segments of society needs to end now. There is no more time for deliberation.

Thank you again for your time and thoughts,

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