



Reefer smartness: A public good

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By Tribune-Review

Legalizing, regulating and taxing recreational marijuana would help strained government budgets significantly, a Cato Institute study finds.

Such legalization would bring public policy in line with reality — marijuana causes demonstrably less societal harm than legal alcohol. Ending the criminalization of otherwise law-abiding Americans, it would save state and federal governments \$8.7 billion annually in law-enforcement, judicial and incarceration costs while generating another \$8.7 billion in tax revenue, according to the study.

State Sen. Daylin Leach, D-Montgomery County, sponsor of legalization legislation, says Pennsylvania could see benefits of more than \$800 million annually — up to \$350 million in criminal-justice savings, plus \$200 million to \$500 million in tax revenue — if it follows the lead of Washington state and Colorado voters and heeds the 58 percent of Americans who now favor legalization.

The Cato study estimates Pennsylvania spends about \$190 million annually on arresting, trying and imprisoning marijuana offenders. The ACLU says that cost is \$100 million. Even if it doesn't approach Mr. Leach's \$350 million, the figure represents significant — and needless — spending.

With these powerful savings and revenue incentives among so many other reasons why legalization is the right thing to do, it's increasingly clear that Gov. Tom Corbett and other opponents are on the wrong side of this issue. It's time to end counterproductive, failed marijuana prohibition in Pennsylvania and nationwide.