



Marijuana Legalization Bill Gets First Public Hearing

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The Connecticut General Assembly's Public Health Committee had some tough questions for the co-sponsors of a bill that would legalize recreational marijuana in Connecticut.

During a public hearing Tuesday in Hartford, Republican Representative Melissa Ziobron, who introduced House Bill 5314, *An Act Concerning the Regulation and Taxation of the Retail Sale and Cultivation of Marijuana for Use by Persons 21 Years of Age And Older*, told the committee that lawmakers are obliged to explore the tough topics.

"Opponents worry about putting a third legal drug on the menu, as if marijuana isn't already the third most popular drug used in America," said Ziobron. "It's already on the menu, you just have to commit a crime to use it."

Ziobron, along with the co-sponsors of the bill, Democratic Representatives Robyn Porter and Toni Walker laid out the reasons why pot should be legalized -- the cost of incarcerating people convicted of cannabis crimes, the potential millions in revenue for the state by taxing marijuana, and by taking marijuana sales out of the hands of gangs and cartels, reducing the potential for Connecticut children access to marijuana.

But the trio fielded a host of often pointed questions from concerned committee members.

"In Colorado, [Colorado legalized pot in 2014] traffic deaths related to marijuana use have increased by 48 percent [since legalization]; marijuana use by youth has increased by 65 percent -- are you concerned this could happen in Connecticut?" asked Republican Senator George Logan.

State Representative Toni Walker countered with a Cato Institute report which showed marijuana related traffic deaths in Colorado have not increased since legalization.

Committee members also expressed concern about how law enforcement would deal with an influx of people driving under the influence of pot, and that legalization would encourage teens to use pot on a regular basis, and could potentially lead to more dangerous drugs.

Ziobron's bill is one of four pending bills that would legalize marijuana in the state.

