

# The QUINNIPIAC CHRONICLE

## A cannabis conversation

Owen Meech

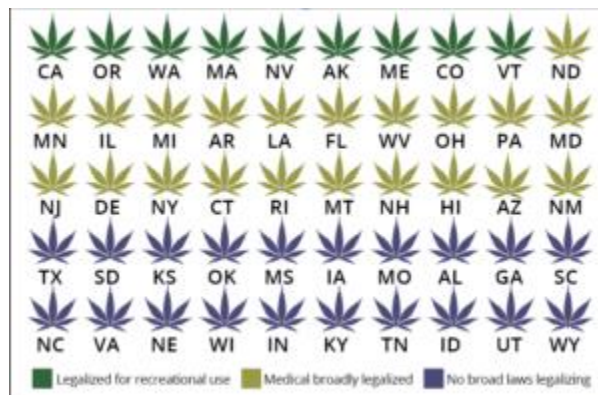
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Over 60 Quinnipiac law students and professors gathered on Thursday, Sept. 6 to hear a former FBI agent advocate for federal legalization of marijuana at the Quinnipiac School of Law (QUSL) Federalist Society’s first event of the year.

The event, “Will Marijuana Send Federalism Up in Smoke?” featured adjunct professor at John Marshall Law School and former FBI special agent and consultant for narcotics trafficking cases, Alicia Hilton, as well as QUSL’s very own law professor, Jennifer Herbst, discussing marijuana legalization and issues surrounding it.

The discussion began with Hilton proclaiming her support for federal legalization of marijuana for the betterment of society, a stance that surprised the students in attendance.

“I was surprised to hear a former FBI agent being pro-legalization,” said first-year law student, Tom Pietruczuk. “I’m personally neither for or against it.”



Infographic by Janna Marnell

Hilton said prosecution of marijuana cases disproportionately affects minority and impoverished communities, as well as young people, which has a trickle effect in society.

“Lives are vastly changed when you enter into the justice system,” Hilton said. “Prison time can be very detrimental to families.”

Since Colorado first legalized marijuana in 2014, other states including Connecticut and Massachusetts have been exploring different options for marijuana legalization. Currently, recreational marijuana is legal in nine states, and medical marijuana is legal in 30 states. Both recreational and medical marijuana are legal in the District of Columbia.

Hilton also cited multiple dangers of obtaining marijuana from dealers on the street, the most crucial being quality control.

“Illegal products cannot be trusted,” said Hilton. “You have absolutely no idea what you are getting.”

Additionally, Hilton compared the debate of legalization to the failure of prohibition in the 1920s, where an uptick in bootlegging and crime was observed in response to alcohol being available only on the black market.

Other problems Hilton mentioned included cartel violence on the border and the risk of being targeted in bad neighborhoods.

Although Hilton supports legalization, she stressed that marijuana can still be addictive.

“I’m a realist. The war on drugs doesn’t work,” Hilton said. “Dispensaries are safer.”

While Hilton doesn’t personally advocate for the use of recreational marijuana, she acknowledged “legitimate, positive effects of medical marijuana.”

Marijuana is now being used by doctors as an alternative to opioid prescriptions for patients dealing with issues such as cancer or chronic pain, according to Jayne Leonard of Medical News Today. Hilton believes that marijuana can be more easily regulated and distributed as a far less addictive option, and serves as part of the solution to the growing opioid epidemic.

In her conclusion, Hilton maintained “decriminalize marijuana on the federal level and let the citizens of the states decide.”

Herbst, who teaches a seminar with law professor Linda Meyer on marijuana policy, echoed the importance of regulation.

“Over 500 strains of marijuana exists, and nothing is regulated,” Herbst said.

However, Herbst noted that with recreational dispensaries comes the loss of relationships between dealers and users, and the ability to know exactly what you are getting. She compared the relationship to “farm to table” dining.

The biggest issue, Herbst said, is that we don’t have an agreement on how marijuana should be regulated.

Herbst believes legalization would decrease the perception of danger among young people who will believe that using marijuana is low-risk. The use of marijuana at a young age can often contribute to the loss of critical problem-solving skills and brain function.

Herbst also stressed that decriminalization of marijuana on the federal level is imperative because the local is critical, but warned, there will always be a black market.

“Different communities have different needs,” she concluded, before the professors proceeded to take questions from students.

Cameron Atkinson, vice president of public relations for QUSL’s Federalist Society was extremely pleased with the turnout and enthusiasm of students in attendance.

“As future lawyers, we will probably be dealing with issues related to this argument in health law, criminal law, tort law and other business law,” said Atkinson. “This talk gave us an in-depth look at the issues surrounding this topic and a chance to debate our views on the matter.”

Eric Spielman, another Quinnipiac law student, said he had no regrets about attending the event.

“It shows that we seem to be on a more progressive track when it comes to legalization of marijuana,” Spielman said . “I came to hear more about federalism in relation to marijuana and I’m happy I did.”

QUSL’s Federalist Society will host Attorney Clark Neily of the CATO Institute in Washington, D.C. for their next event on Thursday, Oct. 4 to discuss criminal justice reform and the current system of plea bargaining.