

Madam Chair & Members of the Human Services Committee

Good Morning:

My name is Valerie Jundt – by way of background I am a proud – and life-long native of Bismarck ND.

I have worked in a professional career for the past 35 years as an unclaimed property specialist. 15 years as a former state employee, 5 years as the Executive Director of the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA); and for the next 20 years served in leadership roles as Subject Matter Expert/Consultant. I was recruited in 2000 to serve as the State & Government Relations Manager with a big 4 accounting firm (Deloitte & Touche LLP) and when they dissolved this service line, was recruited to serve as the National Practice Leader for the Unclaimed Property Services Group at Keane (a nationally recognized unclaimed property services practice based in NY). During my entire career, I was committed to living and raising my family in North Dakota. I had the privilege of working with and for every state; as well as working to serve as a subject matter expert for some of the largest Fortune 50 companies in the United States—in some cases; the world.

For the same reasons that all of you have committed to living in ND and agreed to work as a public servant, my family loves the CULTURE, CHARACTER and COMMUNITY of this state. It is no secret that North Dakotans are recognized throughout the country as UNIQUE because of our hard work ethic, strong character, integrity and honesty.

HB 1420

Trying to understand why there would be support for this bill, I sought out the feedback from several legislators. I was told this was an attempt to proactively pre-empt and provide rules & regulations for the sale of marijuana in our state-and to attach a tax initiative along with it. Also, it was likely inevitable that we would be forced to follow suit since surrounding states and Canada had passed similar laws.

Many concurred they personally didn't agree with this bill, but the impression I was given was that they had been convinced that if this were placed on the ballot for a vote it would likely pass; which would be of greater consequence.

I couldn't reconcile this in my mind and continue to question how our communities, children and state would be impacted compared to the CONSEQUENCES of legalizing an illegal drug. No one has effectively answered that question.

What do we stand to gain – ***compared to what we stand to lose?***

My husband is a nationally certified and K-12 school counselor (having served in the Bismarck School District for over 30 years) – many of those years at the middle school level. I also have a daughter and son-in-law serving as teachers in the middle/high school level. I consider them HERO's; along with all of the other teachers in this state who are committed to working tirelessly to model, groom and educate our children into formidable young adults.

For his entire career, he has been instilling in young adults the benefits of “positive behaviors” vs the risks & severe (sometimes life changing) consequences of drugs & alcohol. All which go beyond just “using” (i.e. the types of individuals that you begin to associate yourself with; the dangers to your health, family and future).

By passing this law, does that now somehow REFUTE all of the efforts and hard work by our teachers, law enforcement, parents and community leaders to reinforce the dangers of drugs (and legitimize) its use? What has magically changed?

Indisputable Facts:

- Marijuana is and has been recognized as a GATEWAY drug leading to even more harmful and dangerous drugs.
- There has been a significant increase in gang related activity, crime and drug use (overdose deaths and suicidal activity); much of which involved illegal drugs.
- For all of its positive qualities, our fine state holds the less than desirable reputation of being in the top 5 states in the nation for underage drinking – and we have held that distinction for many years.
- The legal drinking age in our state is 21...this bill also creates a legal age to purchase, use and be in possession of marijuana at 21.
 - Is there anyone that believes by passing this law and making marijuana even more accessible to purchase it that the underage use and risk for obtaining this drug under the age of 21 won't also skyrocket?
- Has anyone researched the statistics relating to the number of drug related crimes, accidents, educational data in those states that have passed the legalization of marijuana?
 - Don't we want to know this before we make such a critical and irreversible decision?
 - Let me tell you what we witnessed when visiting the state of Oregon not so long ago. The BILLBOARDS offering FREE cannabis (the run down and dangerous environment surrounding the distribution centers)
 - The number of homelessness – crime rates and children negatively impacted by making these drugs more accessible was heartbreaking
 - Couple at the rest area...there is nothing that law enforcement can do about it
 - Are you aware – that Oregon has passed an initiated measure that decriminalizes ALL DRUGS (heroin, cocaine, meth)...the citizens and community there have become complacent and surrendered to the attitude that there's nothing they can do about it anyway...yet how many lives will be affected by this action?

If you don't stand for something – you'll fall for anything. IF WE DON'T TAKE A STAND to reinforce the ND values & commitment to our families & youth – who will?

One of the most effective tools that I was introduced to during my formidable years as a leader included the process of team building a MISSION STATEMENT, GOALS and VALUES model. I'm sure all of you have done this as well. If the services we were offering or the method in which we were billing or performing our work didn't complement any of these KEY principals –

as the leader of our team, this gave me/us the "Meter" by which we would move forward or walk away. *Not always an easy decision – but always the right decision!*

What is our Mission – What do we Value – What are our Goals? Does this bill coincide with those principals – and if not, then why are we considering it?

Why have we GIVEN UP without a fight to EDUCATE – REAFFIRM and COMMIT to healthy behaviors for the citizens in our state?! Once we open this door, the opportunity to reverse course becomes nearly impossible.

I can't help but think of the negative impact this bill would create to an already overworked team in the professional world of Healthcare, Education, Law Enforcement, Social Services & Counselors, much less the negative impact in our communities.

A Colorado representative shared stories at a health conference not that long ago reinforcing the consequences their state has experienced due to legalizing marijuana (increase in crimes, rehab, hospitalizations, overdoses, etc...) far exceeding the income they raised from taxes.

SUMMARY

Unfortunately, no matter which way this bill goes, we are at the crossroads where it is critical to proactively INVEST dollars and resources.

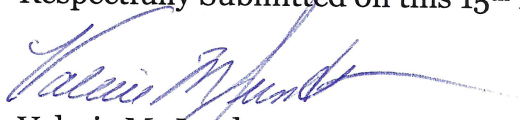
If you agree that this bill does not meet the standards to coincide with our Mission, Values & Goals, then please stand in opposition of this bill. Let's utilize some of our hard earned dollars to proactively communicate to our citizens. Delegate a task force (Critical members in affected state agencies & from our community) to coordinate the marketing and messaging that reinforces the truth and consequences of risky behavior.

If you support the passage of this bill, then at a minimum, I urge you to delegate a significant portion of those dollars generated from the taxes assessed toward activities promoting HEALTHY BEHAVIOR, EDUCATION & PREVENTION.

Our State, Our Community and Our Future depend on the outcome of this decision.

I want to sincerely thank you for your service to our state and for making the time to consider my heartfelt remarks.

Respectfully Submitted on this 15th Day of March, 2021



Valerie M. Jundt

Oregon becomes the first state to decriminalize small amounts of heroin and other street drugs

By Allen Kim, CNN

Updated 8:13 AM ET, Mon November 9, 2020

Oregon voters passed Measure 110, which decriminalizes possession of small amounts of drugs.

(CNN) Oregon has become the first state in the nation to decriminalize the possession and personal use of all drugs.

Voters in the state approved Measure 110 on Wednesday, CNN projected, and the initiative also expands access to addiction assistance and other health services, offering aid to those who need it instead of arresting and jailing people for drugs.

Measure 110 passed with 55.8% of the vote.

Possession of drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine will no longer be punishable by jail time, but instead amount to something similar to a traffic ticket.

"Today's victory is a landmark declaration that the time has come to stop criminalizing people for drug use," said Drug Policy Alliance executive director Kassandra Frederique.

"Measure 110 is arguably the biggest blow to the war on drugs to date. It shifts the focus where it belongs -- on people and public health -- and removes one of the most common justifications for law enforcement to harass, arrest, prosecute, incarcerate, and deport people."

While possession of small amounts of drugs is decriminalized, possession of larger amounts could result in a misdemeanor charge.

The move to decriminalize drugs in Oregon comes after voters in New Jersey, Arizona and South Dakota approved ballot measures to legalize recreational marijuana.