

TESTIMONY
SB 1182
Senate Law and Justice Committee
Public Hearing
Tuesday, January 28, 2014
Presented by

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PESA Government Relations Chair

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PESA Drug Awareness Chair

Chairman McIlhinney, Chairman Ferlo, distinguished members of the Senate Law and Justice Committee, good morning. My name is Tom Helsel and I am Chairman of the Pennsylvania Elks State Association's Government Relations Committee. PESA is comprised of the 93 Lodges in our Commonwealth of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

The Pennsylvania Elks State Association was founded in 1906 and exists to promote the programs of the state association as well as those of the Grand Lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. The B.P.O.E. was founded in 1868 and constituted its first lodge in Pennsylvania in 1871, Philadelphia Lodge #2. Since 1871 hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians have belonged to our honorable fraternity.

As Chairman of the Government Relations Committee one of my duties is to educate and inform our membership of the legislation proposed and enacted by the Pennsylvania Legislature that would affect our Lodges, our programs and our membership. Likewise, the duty to educate and inform flows in the opposite direction in making the Legislature aware of the programs of the B.P.O.E. With that in mind, I would like to introduce to you Steven Kaylor of Columbia - Middletown Lodge #1074. Mr. Kaylor is the Pennsylvania Elks State Association's Drug Awareness Chairman. Mr. Chairman with your permission I would like to turn the balance of our presentation over to Mr. Kaylor.

I am Steven Kaylor, and I am the Chairman of the Pennsylvania Elk's State Association Drug Awareness Program. Since its inception in 1982 the Elk's Drug Awareness Program mission has been dedicated to preventing the use of alcohol, tobacco and other illicit drugs by our nation's youth. In support of our mission we have in place teams in some 93 Lodges across the state. These dedicated personnel work diligently to educate students (grades 3 through 12) and adults by partnering with similarly aligned local organizations. In addition, we also sponsor our own unique programs and events. Our local partners include scholastic institutions, law enforcement departments, and other related agencies. We make available at no cost to the public a wide range of informational materials including brochures, videos, instructional kits designed for use in elementary education, and highly respected motivational speakers such as Milton Creagh. Through these efforts we reach out to over 100,000 students each year. My responsibility is to coordinate and propagate these efforts of the Elks Drug Awareness Program in the state of Pennsylvania.

The PA Elk's State Association and its Local Lodges oppose the legalization or decriminalization of the use, possession, sale, or production of psychoactive substances,

including cannabis. Our belief is that by legalizing marijuana in the context provided under this legislation, we are facilitating the subsequent legalization of marijuana for use by the public as a whole. I am here today to voice my opposition to Senate Bill 1182.

Proponents of Senate Bill 1182 will offer that the legislation will be structured with the appropriate controls to assure that only those individuals who are truly in need and meet the criteria specified under the act will have access to the drug. They will state that these strict guidelines will prevent illicit use. To the contrary we believe that this measure will only lead to additional avenues for the unlawful procurement and use of marijuana and as the United States Food and Drug Administration has not approved marijuana for medicinal use, it is not prudent for our Commonwealth to do so.

As recent as November of 2013 the American Medical Association has re-affirmed their opposition to the legalization of marijuana. The AMA, 527 member House of Delegates has retained their position that "cannabis is a dangerous drug and as such is a public health concern." It is recognized that the abuse of prescription drugs is prevalent in today's society. The legalization of marijuana as a prescription drug provides yet one more substance that can be illegally obtained and abused.

The legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes will result in a lower perceived harm and social disapproval of marijuana. Research illustrates that the use of any illegal drug is directly related to its perception of harm or risk, and social disapproval by the user. Increased use among youth is sure to follow. Studies conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse show that the younger the age of the first time use of drugs, the greater the likelihood that the user will become dependent/and or addicted to drugs as an adult.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) National Surveys on Drug Use and Health present disturbing statistics in this regard. The 2009-2010 data collected for this report indicated that "eight of the top ten states, and sixteen of the top twenty states with the highest percentage of past month marijuana users ages 12 to 17 are states with medicinal marijuana programs. The data further supports that seven of the top ten states with the lowest age of first use for marijuana are states with medical marijuana programs.

Additional SAMHSA studies indicate that from 1997 to 2007 the number of persons aged 12 or older in treatment for marijuana dependence and abuse increased 45% from 197,840 to 287,933. In 2007 60.8% of all youth ages (12-15) and 55.9% of ages (15-19) admitted for drug and alcohol treatment were admitted for marijuana abuse.

Legalization of marijuana for medicinal use and/or liberalizing through decriminalization will only increase the negative trends evident in these studies. The result will be an ever increasing burden on our civic resources and the further deterioration of our most precious asset for maintaining our future prominence as a state and as a nation; our youth.

Therefore, the Pennsylvania Elk's State Association respectfully asserts our opposition to Senate Bill 1182, and we ask that you also oppose it.