

Gary Frost Testimony

Ohio House of Representatives – March 6, 2023

Ladies and gentlemen of the Ohio House, first of all I want to say “Thank you” for allowing me this opportunity to come and speak to a matter that I am very passionate about.

My name is Gary Frost and I currently reside in Youngstown Ohio where I was born and raised. I’m a college and seminary graduate and have served as pastor, denominational leader and non-profit organization founder. But my greatest achievement thus far is that I have been married 46 years to the same woman and we have 6 children, 6 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. My wife, Lynette, and I have been foster parents for over 40 children and 2 of our sons are adopted. I have pastored in Youngstown for 21 years and in Brooklyn New York for 5 years where I joined with numerous New York pastors to found the Urban Eagle Mentoring program at Rikers Island Jail. Our focal point was the juvenile facility which housed 16 to 18 year old boys from all 5 boroughs. I would estimate that 80 per cent of these boys were essentially fatherless. I know it sounds cliché but surely I learned more from them than they learned from me.

The reason I share this personal information is to communicate the fact that I have been invested in seeking the healthiness of youth, families and communities for approaching 50 years and I know from firsthand experience the deceptive and subtle destructiveness of marijuana usage. I have watched this clever monster destroy lives of innumerable families as it is without a doubt a gateway drug, regardless of what the experts say. I believe that the proliferation of high potency marijuana in our communities and in our culture is one of the primary causes of

the scourge of what I call “Triflingness” among young men in general and young black men in specific. Prolonged marijuana use kills ambition and turns dreams into fantasies and fantasies into nightmares.

As a pastor, a father, a grandfather and a great-grandfather I feel a strong urge to just stand up and shout from the top of my lungs “Please don’t pass this destructive legislation”. But I will submit to the civility of this chamber and rather than shout, I will hope and pray that you hear a cry from the depths of my heart and soul, “PLEASE SAY NO TO THIS EXPANSION BILL”. It is another step in the wrong direction.

Let me quickly add that I join the chorus of those who acknowledge that there is definitely some medical benefit to be realized from cannabis. Medicines like Marinol have proven to be effective in their application. But as I understand this bill, it opens the door to something far beyond medical. It increases the possibilities for youth and children to be exposed to high potency mental poison, otherwise known as THC. Why in the world would we do anything to further complicate the mental health chaos that is inundating our society?

There’s an illustrative story told about a little community high in the mountains that had a particularly dangerous curve in the road, overlooking a cliff, where many vehicles careened over the edge and plunged into the valley below. Recognizing this problem, the city council convened and decided to build an emergency clinic at the foot of the cliff so that first responders would be stationed at the scene to provide medical care for those unlucky travelers who failed to successfully negotiate the curve. Thank goodness, just before the vote that was sure to pass, an old and seasoned councilman spoke up and said, Hey, I have a better idea ... why don’t we just build a really strong railing system at the curve above the cliff to keep the cars from going

off the road. It was an "ah hah" moment ... unanimously they decided to build the railing instead.

Here's the point: Our children are already traveling a very treacherous mountain road with numerous deadly curves. Why in the world would we elect to increase the speed limit, ice the roads and remove the railings? We don't need to build more trauma centers, we need to create boundaries that will ensure our children's survival and thrival.

We are all well aware of the data that has been collected regarding the negative impact of marijuana in our culture in general and in our children and youth in particular. You've heard it before but let's just hear it again:

- People who begin using marijuana before age 18 are 4 to 7 times more likely than adults to develop a marijuana use disorder.
- The marijuana industry targets kids by producing marijuana edibles in the forms of popular candy and snack brands and markets these drugs both offline and on social media.
- Marijuana is addictive and may cause mental illnesses or exacerbate mental illness to include anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, psychosis, schizophrenia, and these risks are heightened with youth use. Daily users of high potency THC are five times more likely to develop a severe mental illness.
- Marijuana use can severely affect brain development in youth, leading to lower IQ and worsening mental health, academic, professional outcomes and life satisfaction.
- Illicit markets have thrived in every "legal" state, such as Oregon, where illegal marijuana makes up more than 70% of the market.
- Among concerns of systemic injustice against lower-income, minority communities, legalization of marijuana only harms these communities further by promoting increased drug use and the accompanying negative social consequences.

I WILL TAKE THIS ONE A STEP FURTHER ... THE CURRENT STRATEGIES FOR THE DISPENSING OF MARIJUANA ARE RACIST.

I would say that most, if not all, of you legislators are well aware of these and many more facts regarding the devastating impact that the passage of this bill will instigate. It is an open secret that the sponsors of this bill are pursuing passage in order to pave the way for the sale of recreational marijuana in our state. Someone said that the foolish man learns from his own mistakes, but the wise man learns from other people's mistakes. Other states have taken this marijuana journey that Ohio is embarking on and "it ain't workin" ... let's not be foolish ... let's be wise.

In closing, I will refrain from preaching a sermon this morning, but I do want to quote words that came from the lips of the most influential human being who ever lived ... someone said of this person "You can love him or you can hate him ... but you can't ignore him". His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is without a doubt the most influential, impactful and consequential person who ever lived and his words are the most respected and revered utterances known to man.

Jesus had something very sobering to say about the consequences of endangering the lives of children. He said in Matthew 18:6 *"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"*

Many of you live your political lives in hopes of a positive result on election day. Please be aware that beyond election day ... there is a judgment day.