

April 21, 2015

**Re: Reallocation of Initiative-502 tax revenue in SSB 6062/SSB 5077 and
2SHB 2136/SHB 1106**

Dear Lawmakers,

The undersigned organizations and individuals, representing Washington State's substance abuse prevention, treatment, and public health communities, along with the ACLU of Washington, are greatly concerned about legislation currently under consideration that seeks to reallocate earmarked tax revenue in Initiative 502 (I-502). Diverting these funds would directly contradict the will of Washington voters, who made it clear in passing I-502 that they wanted a well-regulated and public health-oriented approach to marijuana policy rather than just legalization without more. And these funds provide resources for substance abuse prevention and treatment programming, drug education for youth and adults, community health care services, academic research, and evaluation, all of which are currently grossly underfunded.

Reallocating money from I-502's original earmarks defies the will of Washington's voters. By eliminating the Dedicated Marijuana Fund, the relevant Senate proposals, SSB 6062 and SSB 5077, would effectively eliminate I-502's earmarks, ignoring the Initiative's intent to "[g]enerate[] new ... tax revenue for ... health care, research, and substance abuse prevention."¹ The House proposals, 2SHB 2136 and SHB 1106, are not as sweeping as the Senate's, but would still redirect money away from prevention programs to other non-marijuana-related programs. In moving forward with this cash grab, the legislature would be risking the interests and health of both Washington's youth and its adults—the former would not get the benefit of participating in evidence-based prevention programs, and the latter will not get sufficient education about risky marijuana use. Neither is a good outcome for Washington. I-502 won by a large margin, receiving almost 56% support, and won in 20 of Washington's 39 counties (including 5 east of the Cascades)—the legislature should respect the clearly expressed will of Washington's voters.

Using I-502-earmarked funds to fill a budget hole now is dangerously shortsighted and unwise from both a public health and a cost-benefit perspective. Reduced funding for prevention and drug education programs today means increased substance abuse tomorrow, which translates directly to lost productivity and more health care costs down the line. The increased costs of these outcomes in the years to come will make today's supposed savings pale by comparison. As the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has shown repeatedly, the benefits from evidence-based public health/prevention and substance programs far outweigh the costs.²

Washington voters also enacted a measure that was to have been robustly evaluated by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.³ Independent, reliable cost-benefit evaluation of the impacts of I-502 is critical to ensuring the legislature has solid data to inform future decisions about funding priorities that protect and promote public health and safety. SSB 6062 repeals the

¹ Initiative 502 (2012), Part I – Intent – available at <http://www.newapproachwa.org/sites/newapproachwa.org/files/I-502%20bookmarked.pdf>.

² WSIPP – Benefit-Cost Results – available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost>

³ RCW 69.50.550

provisions mandating and funding these evaluations, which is unwise from a policy and public health perspective. Under the Senate proposal, funding for marijuana related research at the University of Washington and Washington State University would also be cut.

I-502 is still a new law and the general public is unfamiliar with its features—making this a crucial time for public education about the law. According to research from the University of Washington, “only 57 percent of Washington parents surveyed knew the legal age for recreational marijuana use.”⁴ One of the study’s authors indicated it “convincingly points out that people don’t have good information about the new law.”⁵ To combat this misinformation, the legislature must invest in prevention and drug education, which is known to work—for example, youth initiation of tobacco use was cut in half when tobacco litigation settlement dollars went to prevention programs. Now is not the time to cut funding for programs that prevent marijuana use and abuse by youth.

Lawmakers should not defy the will of the voters by reallocating I-502 tax revenue away from substance abuse prevention and treatment programming, drug education for youth and adults, community health care services, academic research, and evaluation. Please leave I-502’s critical earmarks intact.

Sincerely,

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⁴ UW Today, Deborah Bach, *Study Shows Teens and Adults Hazy on Washington Marijuana Law*, March 9, 2015, available at <http://www.washington.edu/news/2015/03/09/study-shows-teens-and-adults-hazy-on-washington-marijuana-law/>.

⁵ Id.

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