

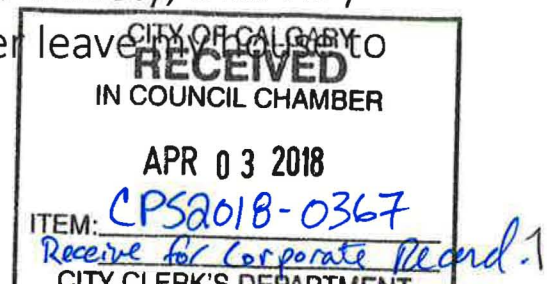
April 3rd 2018

Your Worship and Council Members, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Amberlyn Aguilar, A-G-U-I-L-A-R, and as a concerned citizen, I would like to raise 3 issues regarding the proposed ban on the public consumption of cannabis.

As someone who has purchased cannabis medicinally in order to treat ongoing anxiety and depression, I can imagine myself at a social event, nervous and nauseated, for no particular reason other than the fact that there are more people in the room. I excuse myself and step outside to smoke cannabis because I know that this plant does wonders for me, increasing the presence of naturally-occurring brain chemicals called endocannabinoids, which helps to regulate immune function, the digestive system, and mood, to name just a few. In fact, proved in a 2014 study done by Vanderbilt University, the reduction of endocannabinoids, these natural chemicals that our body already creates, could be a major cause of anxiety disorder¹.

My first issue is that instantly, under this proposed ban, I am regarded as a criminal until I can prove otherwise. Attempting to medicate myself peacefully in order to attend a social event now invites scrutiny and stigmatization from onlookers. It also invites harassment from a police officer, where I must provide a receipt of my medical cannabis in order to prove to that I am not a criminal.

What if I forgot my receipt that day, what if instead, I am shamed in public from smoking cannabis, inconvenienced by an authority figure, given a penalty, and embarrassed in front of the people at the event I'm trying to make friends at. With someone who has anxiety, that very encounter would cause me to go home and never leave to attend a social event again.



Now imagine witnessing the very scenario I just described, as an onlooker who has no experience or knowledge about cannabis. My second issue is that this ban would further encourage stigmatization and would present cannabis as an illicit and taboo drug that should never be seen unless behind closed doors. That mentality, that cannabis is a health problem used only by criminals, led to the failed prohibition stance on cannabis in the first place, and that this ban would perpetuate. If recreational cannabis is becoming legalized, why would we go backwards in our ideologies regarding what is right and wrong, what is lawful and not?

I also want to note that it is well known that many mood disorders, including anxiety, depression, or PTSD go undiagnosed. Science has proven that cannabis can help treat a variety of ailments, from severe arthritis and chronic pain, to migraines and stress. There are many recreational consumers that use cannabis because they know that it works with minor day-to-day issues, just like the people who know that they cannot start their day without coffee in the morning.

In that thought experiment, I am labelled and thought of as a criminal, and people who aren't well informed are dissuaded from seeking proper help or acknowledging that a natural substance can work for them, and instead could abuse prescription medication or turn to other drugs, such as opioids, tobacco, and alcohol.

Which brings me to my last point:

As stated in this proposal, the Government of Alberta indicated that their public consumption regulations are focused on the health effects of second-hand smoke, and additional rationale supplied in Attachment 5 indicates that in a survey Calgarians prefer cannabis usage rules to be like those for alcohol consumption.

We cannot address the consumption of cannabis as being similar to the rules of alcohol consumption because they do not pose the same health risks for the consumer. Alcohol, as we all know, has been proven to impair judgement, worsen mood disorders, and is listed as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

When it comes to comparing cannabis and tobacco second-hand smoke, a study published in the US National Library of Medicine found that cannabis and tobacco smoke are not equally carcinogenic, and that the substance in tobacco, nicotine, promotes tumor growth and carcinogenic effects are amplified. In contrast, the substance in cannabis, cannabinoids such as THC or CBD, promote tumor regression and inhibits enzymes necessary to activate the carcinogens found in smoke². Simply put, the health risks posed by cannabis second-hand smoke do not even come close to the higher and fatal risks of tobacco second-hand smoke.

The research shown in Attachment 5, two articles almost a decade old, suggests that both the compounds THC and CBD can cause hallucinations. An article, supported by Harvard Health Publishing, states that CBD has little, if any, intoxicating properties and patients report very little, if any, alteration in consciousness⁴. There are forms of cannabis, non-psychoactive strains, that pose almost no risk to the public, something you cannot say about alcohol or tobacco. In a recent 2017 study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, researchers concluded that “alignment of tobacco and marijuana smoking bylaws may result in the most effective public policies”³.

To conclude, this proposed ban on cannabis would only help to reverse society’s acceptance of cannabis, and further perpetuate the stigma that using cannabis is unlawful.

We don't need to scare people by using outdated research, avoiding the conversation on cannabis and following a deterrence strategy of justice. We need well-informed, educational, and frankly, unbiased policies founded on recent scientific research.

As someone who was born and raised in this city, a Canadian citizen, a female visible minority, and someone who suffers from depression and mood disorders, I do not need another reason to be harassed by authority figures or discriminated against publicly because I choose to alleviate my pain in the least harmful way possible. This ban would be detrimental to my dignity, placing me in the same category as criminals, rather than a good, rational, human being who finds relief in cannabis, just like many medicinal and recreational consumers do too. My autonomy of using this plant in order to live my life without pain and isolation should overrule the implementation of a policy that is merely convenient at this time.

Your Worship, Council members, I ask you to please consider your position on this issue and how it represents those in your communities. Let's not just choose what is convenient; let's progress Calgary as an accepting and tolerant city that allows their citizens to make informed, rational decisions with unbiased and educational resources, rather than making that decision for them. Let's consider the legalization of cannabis, as something that can benefit so many people and is continuing to keep many people alive in this city, without the stigma. Thank you.

1 <https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2014/03/06/discovery-sheds-new-light-on-marijuana-anxiety-relief-effects/>

2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1277837/>

3 <http://cmaajopen.ca/content/5/4/E814.full>

4 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/medical-marijuana-2018011513085>