



# FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

*The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida*

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## AMENDMENT 2

### **Concerns Require a Closer Look**

October 1, 2014

On Election Day, Floridians will vote on an amendment to the Florida Constitution that would allow the “use of marijuana for certain medical conditions.” We acknowledge that federal policies regarding controlled substances have hampered evaluation of the medical value of marijuana and its derivatives and that all beneficial uses have not been realized. At first glance, the proposed amendment appeals to a sense of empathy and implies safe and limited use by the infirm; however, closer inspection reveals that the framework established by Amendment 2 is problematic in the following ways:

- **Potential for fraud and abuse**

The language in Amendment 2 defining “debilitating medical condition” is vague, even allowing use for minor ailments. The amendment does not require a doctor’s prescription that specifies dosage and frequency. Instead, the physician issues a “certificate” allowing the purchase of marijuana in any quantity and form. Ambiguities of Amendment 2 create opportunities for abuse and fraud similar to the “pill mill” scenarios experienced in Florida and elsewhere.

- **No assurances of quality, consistency in products**

There are pharmaceutical grade products that harness therapeutic properties of marijuana, such as Marinol™, used for nausea and loss of appetite for cancer and HIV/AIDS patients. Other products are under development at different stages.

Amendment 2 does not relate to these, but rather to marijuana plants, which pose unique problems for “medical” use. It is not possible to standardize the 66+ active chemical compounds in the stems, leaves and seeds of the marijuana plant, which poses risks for those seeking treatment. Batch-to-batch variations increase the likelihood that no two products derived from the marijuana plant will be the same and have the same effect when inhaled or ingested. Marijuana products provided under Amendment 2 will not be subject to FDA regulations and safeguards that protect the consumer and guide the physician.

- **No requirement to try alternatives first**

Under standard medical care, the least expensive, least intrusive intervention that can meet a medical need is typically attempted first. There is no requirement in Amendment 2 that necessitates such attempts prior to certifying use for inhaled or ingested marijuana.

- **Allows for greater access to marijuana by youth**

Increased access to marijuana and its presence in the home has the potential of leading to dangerous experimentation by youth and, especially when prepared in the form of candy or sweet treats, accidental ingestion by children and other vulnerable populations. A recent study in the *Journal of Neuroscience*<sup>i</sup> demonstrated that marijuana use by adolescents and young adults is linked to abnormal brain development.

Our God-given capacity for compassion impels us to seek treatment for the sick and to alleviate the pain experienced by those who suffer. However, in doing so, we must ensure that we are not endangering those we are hoping to help by exposing them to even greater harm. While there could be beneficial applications to the medical use of marijuana, the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops urges voters to carefully assess the risks involved with legalizing marijuana through an amendment to the Florida Constitution.

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.jneurosci.org/content/34/16/5529.short>