

Written OPPONENT testimony for SB 555 Creating the medical cannabis pilot program act to establish the medical cannabis pilot program for limited cultivation, processing and dispensing of medical cannabis and medical cannabis products.

To: Chairman Mike Thompson, Kansas Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

From: Brett Farley, Executive Director, Catholic Conference of Oklahoma

Date: March 26, 2024

Chairman Thompson and members of the Kansas Federal and State Affairs Committee:

My name is Brett Farley, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Oklahoma, the public policy voice of the Oklahoma Catholic Bishops. **Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as an OPPONENT to SB 555, commonly referred to as “Medical Marijuana” legislation.**

The perspective from Oklahoma and medical marijuana may be helpful as we are currently dealing with the negative fallout that has engulfed our state since “medical marijuana” was approved by voters in 2018 with the passage of State Question 788.

In the run-up to State Question 788, voters were promised by industry leaders and their advocates that a new medical marijuana regime would be heavily regulated, heavily taxed, and heavily leveraged for critical health care support.

A handful of years later, legislators are in a rush to fix a broken system by imposing punitive taxes, fees, and regulations to rein in what has become a Russian bizarre of thousands of mutations of marijuana — with unrated dangerous levels of THC — that could be considered anything but medical.

In the aftermath of the wreckage, Oklahoma voters have been treated to local and national headlines and ledes that tell the story well. Here are just a few:

“The unlikely boom market has been sullied by dozens of raids on illegal cultivation sites, rampant diversion of products into the illicit market, allegations of human trafficking and grisly crimes, including a quadruple murder of Chinese nationals at a weed farm last November.”¹

“With cheap land and low fees, Oklahoma-grown marijuana fuels the black market in other states”²

¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/30/oklahoma-marijuana-business-bust-00123797#:~:text=The unlikely boom market has,a weed farm last November.>

² <https://www.readfrontier.org/stories/with-cheap-land-and-low-fees-oklahoma-grown-marijuana-fuels-the-black-market-in-other-states/>

“Weed Wars: Oklahoma law enforcement fights uphill battle against illegal marijuana”³

“Oklahoma Has Become a Top Source of Black-Market Weed”⁴

“Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics battling organized crime in marijuana industry”⁵

I am aware that our problems here are part of the Kansas conversation, and proponents believe they have crafted a bill that avoids what we are experiencing in our state. However, there exist challenges endemic to the marijuana industry — medical or recreational — that are nearly impossible to prevent and all the more difficult to regulate, no matter how well-crafted any legislation may be.

Research from the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority indicates that Oklahoma’s medical marijuana industry has exploded to a point where it now produces 64 times more cannabis than needed for legal consumption within the state. This oversupply fuels black market sales, with Oklahoma-grown marijuana traced to nearly every state in the nation.

Many illegal grow operations sprung up almost overnight after the passage of SQ788 which are linked to foreign criminal organizations, engaging in practices such as indentured labor, pesticide use, and interstate marijuana trafficking. These criminal activities pose significant challenges to law enforcement efforts.

The Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics (OBN) has been actively engaged in combating these criminal activities related to marijuana since the passage of SQ788. This includes shutting down over 800 illegal marijuana grow operations and apprehending more than 200 individuals involved in criminal activities, including “cartel lieutenants.”

The criminal organizations, predominantly of Chinese origin but also with ties to Mexico, Russia, Armenia, and Bulgaria, have not only engaged in marijuana cultivation but also facilitated sex trafficking and exploitation of workers. Many workers, living in dire conditions, are victims themselves and are coerced into illegal activities. Despite recent regulatory changes requiring stricter criteria for obtaining grow licenses, criminal organizations continue to circumvent these measures.

Here are just a few statistics borne out of the challenges resulting from the passage of medical marijuana in just five years:

- 600,000 pounds of marijuana seized from the black market.
- 3,000 out of 6,200 grow farms under investigation.

³ <https://okcfox.com/news/local/oklahoma-marijuana-weed-medical-grow-bureau-of-narcotics-mexico-china-russia-slovakia-criminal-organization-crime-law-enforcement-mark-woodard-state-question-788-drugs-dan-synder-obn-farms-hennessey-kingfisher-county-cannabis>

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/oklahoma-has-become-a-top-source-of-black-market-weed-11671990991>

⁵ https://www.enidnews.com/news/local_news/oklahoma-bureau-of-narcotics-battling-organized-crime-in-marijuana-industry/article_7ae782e2-bdc2-11ed-8317-5b9626ba2a28.html

- 386,000 Oklahomans hold medical marijuana patient licenses, representing nearly 10% of the state's population.
- rampant addiction problems overwhelming addiction clinics
- significant increase in emergency room admissions for children aged 0-5 due to marijuana edibles overdose, from five cases in 2017 to 299 cases in 2022.
- Oklahoma is now the top supplier of black market marijuana in the country.
- OBN has shut down nearly 1,000 illicit grow operations in the past two years, but an estimated 5,000 more may still be operational.

Oklahoma voters approved so-called medical marijuana in 2018 by a margin of 57%. Merely five years later those same voters overwhelmingly rejected recreational marijuana by a margin of 62% in which a local journalist declared "Oklahoma voters didn't say 'no' to recreational marijuana...they said HELL no!"

In Oklahoma we've seen all too clearly what buyer's remorse means, and legislators have been busy with dozens of bills each session aimed at rolling it back. We urge our friends across the border to learn from our mistakes and trespass not where we have tread. The grass truly is not greener.

Thank you again for considering this testimony in opposition to SB 555.

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