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Prevention, Treatment, and Public Health Experts Submit Recommendations on Marijuana Rulemaking

SEATTLE – Today, a group of substance abuse prevention and treatment professionals and public health advocates, in collaboration with the ACLU of Washington, submitted recommendations for marijuana rulemaking to the state Liquor Control Board. Initiative 502, passed by Washington voters last November, requires the board to finalize regulations governing marijuana production and distribution by December 1. The deadline for the public to submit input on the drafting of rules for producer licenses is March 15.

“Much of the public discussion of Initiative 502 has focused on business opportunities and potential tax revenue,” said Alison Holcomb, drug policy director for ACLU of Washington and author of the initiative. “We want to highlight the features that are intended to promote positive public health and safety outcomes for our communities.”

The group recommends that the board “start small” in industry scale and volume of marijuana produced, adopt advertising regulations that minimize exposure to people under 21 years of age, and incorporate lessons from the regulation of alcohol and tobacco.

“We’ve had some success with preventing and reducing tobacco use through advertising restrictions, labeling requirements, and public health education campaigns,” said Elaine Ishihara, director of the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition Against Tobacco (“APICAT”). “However,

lawmakers, public health advocates, and community members must commit to working together to sustain programs and strategies that work, and to protect our more vulnerable populations from preventable negative public health outcomes.”

Roger Roffman, UW professor of social work and marijuana dependence treatment professional noted, “Initiative 502 dedicates funding to monitor and evaluate the impacts of its implementation on public health, and on youth and adult rates of marijuana use and dependence. We’re presented with a unique opportunity to measure and compare the effectiveness of a public health approach to marijuana with the prohibition model we’re leaving behind.”

The organizations and individuals joining in these recommendations include APICAT, the Children’s Alliance, SAMA (Science and Management of Addictions) Foundation, the UW School of Social Work’s Innovative Programs Research Group, Mike Graham-Squire, Gary Hothi, CDP, MSWc, and the ACLU of Washington.

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