



Rick Staly, Sheriff
FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

"An honor to serve, a duty to protect."

The Hidden Dangers of Amendment 3 - Recreational Marijuana

As Flagler County voters consider Amendment 3, which proposes the legalization of recreational marijuana in Florida, we must consider the serious consequences Amendment 3 would impose on our community and what Amendment 3 backers, with their well-funded commercials, aren't telling you.

When I started my career, possession of any amount of marijuana was a felony. Over the years this was downgraded to possessing less than 20 grams was a misdemeanor. Today, possession often results in a seizure and no arrest. Amendment 3 will allow personal possession of 3 ounces, the highest in the nation, and 4-times the current misdemeanor amount or about 150 marijuana joints. This is the equivalent to carrying over 7 packs of cigarettes.

Marijuana today is not the marijuana of yester-year or the "hippy" generation. Today the THC levels are at least 5-times stronger than just 15-years ago. The consumption of such potent products can lead to acute health issues, such as severe anxiety, psychosis and heart complications. Studies indicate a correlation between regular marijuana use and the onset of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety and schizophrenia, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

States with legalized marijuana have seen sharp increases in emergency room visits and hospitalizations related to marijuana use. These states have seen 3,000% increase in calls to poison control, often because the product is mistaken for candy or marijuana-edible related emergencies in children. These products are often marketed in appealing forms like edibles and concentrates containing THC levels far exceeding what was commonly seen in the past.

Beyond public health concerns the legalization of recreational marijuana presents serious risks to public safety, especially on our roadways. Data from states with legalized marijuana show a rise in crashes and fatalities involving drivers impaired by marijuana. But unlike alcohol, marijuana impairment is difficult to measure and more challenging for deputies to enforce.

Despite commercials that say legalizing marijuana will reduce or eliminate the illegal marijuana distribution by Mexican cartels, states that have legalized marijuana still have thriving illicit markets, often involving more potent and dangerous products, by cartels undercutting legal sales. Other crimes related to both legal and illicit marijuana sales in nearby businesses or neighborhoods have flourished. Claims that legalization will eliminate the black market are bogus.

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Illegal marijuana is easily detected by smell and through investigative means during a traffic stop that leads to a legal search. Often these traffic stops lead to the discovery of fentanyl, methamphetamines, cocaine, heroin and armed convicted felons, all because they were smoking an illicit joint while driving and committing a traffic violation. Amendment 3 would handcuff law enforcement in their ability to find and seize these drugs.

Our K-9's are currently dual-purpose dogs, meaning they can track suspects and sniff for illicit narcotics, including marijuana. Because you cannot "deprogram" a dog, all K-9's would either become single purpose tracking K-9's only or all K-9's would have to be retired, and replacements be purchased and trained at a cost to local taxpayers of over \$200,000. During the 6-9 month transition all other drugs being transported in a vehicle would likely go free to be sold in our community.

Reading the fine print of the full amendment would allow smoking in all public places. Because Amendment 3 amends the Florida Constitution, local governments cannot pass a law prohibiting open air smoking of recreational marijuana in public places. In a crazy dichotomy of laws and regulations, the smoking of *medical marijuana*, would remain prohibited in public areas. Personally, I don't want to smell cigarette smoke or marijuana joints!

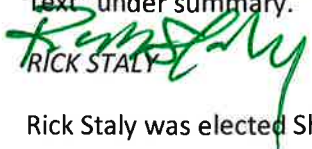
Supporters of Amendment 3 often highlight the "economic benefits" and its estimated \$4 billion industry in Florida alone. These economic benefits fail to account for the increased society costs, such as its impact to the healthcare system, car crashes resulting in injury and death, additional strain on child and youth services, social services, workplace productivity and the criminal justice system. These costs can far exceed the revenue generated from marijuana sales and will become a burden to the taxpayer.

In investigations I've always been told to "follow the money." More than \$60 million is being spent by proponents of Amendment 3. Ask yourself "why?" It's not because it's good for Florida. It's because big business sees a cash cow for their bottom-line and will dump the long-term effects on you – the taxpayer.

In my opinion, the potential benefits do not outweigh the significant risks to our quality of life. All you must do is look at states that have gone down this path and realize it's the wrong path for our community and Florida's future. While the idea of personal freedom and economic opportunity may be appealing, the hidden dangers of marijuana legalization present a clear threat to health, safety and the well-being of Flagler County and Florida.

As voters, we must consider the long-term consequences for our communities and families. Florida is worth saving from the dangers of recreational marijuana. While it may be too late for Colorado and California, we can make the right choices for Flagler County and Florida. I encourage you to read the full amendment, not just the summary that is on the ballot, to make an informed decision. You can read the full proposed amendment here:

<https://dos.elections.myflorida.com/initiatives/initdetail.asp?account=83475&seqnum=2> and clicking "View Full Text" under summary.


RICK STALY

Rick Staly was elected Sheriff of Flagler County in 2016.

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