



California Narcotic Officers' Association California Police Chiefs Association



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Honorable Mark Leno
Member of the Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Leno:

The California Narcotic Officers Association and the California Police Chiefs Association regret that they must oppose Senate Bill 566, which would legalize the cultivation of industrial hemp in California. This bill will undermine law enforcement efforts to curtail marijuana cultivation and will result in significantly increased costs in connection with the prosecution of marijuana trafficking cases.

Grown in the wild, hemp and marijuana are visually indistinguishable. The impact of legalizing hemp will be that marijuana cultivators will be able to camouflage their illegal grows with a perimeter of same sex hemp plants. Effectively this will require law enforcement to test plants for THC content before taking any action – and beguiling hemp camouflage can enable the cultivator to potentially escape accountability altogether. Since the state crime labs currently are not equipped to test for THC content, they will either have to incur the costs of gearing up for this function, or local agencies will have to incur the additional costs of finding a private lab to conduct testing.

The cost of THC testing has another dimension in the context of marijuana trafficking prosecutions – if SB 566 becomes law, every prosecution for marijuana trafficking, cultivation, or transportation, will now require prosecutors to test the seized product for THC content. Again, according to the Attorney General's office, there are no state crime labs that test for THC content. The increased costs for marijuana trafficking prosecutions are incalculable.

Perhaps the additional costs to law enforcement could be justified if there were some countervailing economic benefit from hemp production. The best evidence suggests, however, that no such countervailing economic benefit will occur. Although SB 566 proponents argue (with a vigor that calls to mind the patent medicine salesmen of the old west) that hemp cultivation will be a virtual economic and ecological panacea for Californians, the assertions are without foundation. According to Dr. Valerie Vantrees-Askren, Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Kentucky, hemp is a niche market product and is destined to remain so. Dr. Vantrees-Askren points out that cultivation costs are highly labor intensive and effectively mean that American farmers will not be able to compete against heavily subsidized Chinese and European hemp producers.

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