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Det. Sgt. Neil Woods, Fmr.
Staffordshire Moorlands, England
LEAP U

Date: 2/27/2025

Re: Legal Regulation of Cannabis

To: Legal Affairs Committee of Parliament of Finland

Dear Esteemed Committee Members:

My name is Neil Woods, and I am a former police officer for the Derbyshire Constabulary in England, as well as a board member for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide expert testimony as you debate the legal regulation of cannabis, which I consider to be a critical policy tool for disrupting criminal organizations that profit off illegal drug sales.

LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and addressing the root causes of crime.

I dedicated more than 20 years of my life to drug enforcement because I believed my efforts were benefiting public safety by keeping drugs out of the communities I served. However, throughout my career, I also observed firsthand how police activity in drug markets can increase violence and the effectiveness of organised crime without having any impact on market size.

The unfortunate truth is that so long as there remains a demand for cannabis, someone will meet it. When there are no legal options, the underground market fills this gap, offering products that are unregulated, untaxed, and free from age control requirements. This illicit cannabis fuels organized crime, putting all consumers, including young people, in danger.

When young people obtain cannabis from the underground market, they necessarily come into contact with sellers who won't ask for identification, don't abide by quality standards to ensure products are safe, and who may be involved with other illegal activity, including human trafficking and the manufacturing or sale of harder, more dangerous drugs.

History shows us that arrests and enforcement-based strategies do not affect the availability of unregulated cannabis. It is therefore more effective to create a safer, regulated supply than to rely on increasing punishment for illegal suppliers and users.

Though it takes time to create a regulated market that effectively competes with the illegal one, we have seen that legal regulation eventually drives underground markets out of business because licit markets offer safer, higher-quality products that consumers prefer.

With the shift away from illicit sales, we often see reduced cannabis use among youth. Legal dispensaries enforce age restrictions, limiting the ability of youth to access cannabis. Research from U.S. states that have legalized cannabis has shown declining or stable rates of use among youth after enactment. In Canada, studies have similarly shown no increase in youth cannabis use after legal regulation, with a recent study of drug use trends among youth showing a decline in past-year cannabis use in 2021.

The legal regulation of cannabis also leads to an erosion of social stigma against illegal drug use, which can help to facilitate more open discussions around safety and treatment. This translates to improved resources and access for cannabis consumers who may seek help for substance use issues.

As Finland considers legal regulation, policymakers should examine the successes and shortcomings of other similar efforts. In the United States, where cannabis remains illegal at the national level even as nearly half of all states have legalized, the piecemeal approach has kept the demand for illicit cannabis alive and well in states with no legal market.

Lawmakers must also craft a policy that ensures a newly created legal cannabis market can compete with its illicit counterparts. If taxes and other operational costs drive the price of legal cannabis too high, consumers may have financial incentive to continue seeking out illegal cannabis, which will likely remain cheaper due to the lower overhead and lack of regulation.

With carefully considered policy, I am confident that the legal regulation of cannabis can provide positive benefits for Finland in terms of both public safety and health, as it has in other nations. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important matter.

Respectfully,

Neil Woods
Derbyshire Constabulary / East Midlands Special Operations Unit
Staffordshire Moorlands, England