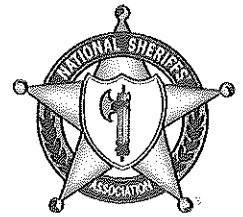




SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

Incorporated March 11, 1929



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MEDIA RELEASE

Immediate Release
March 6, 2021

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Newly Enacted Cannabis Decriminalization Law Needs Reform Already Say State's County Sheriffs

The Sheriffs' Association of New Jersey (SANJ) strongly urges the Governor and the state legislature to quickly pass legislation that amends the decriminalization statute enacted on February 22, 2021. "The voters decided that cannabis should be legal. However, for the safety and well-being of our children, intervention strategies should never be halted. The threat of criminal charges against police if they intervene is extremely disturbing," said Morris County Sheriff James M. Gannon.

County Sheriff's Offices along with other law enforcement officials have developed programs to halt the use of illegal drugs and to help individuals with addiction. The newly enacted legislation is a step backward in allowing these agencies to help those that need help. The inability for law enforcement to be able to talk to a parent or guardian about the use of marijuana or alcohol by an underage boy or girl, not only sends the wrong message but takes away a parental right.

Several counties, in addition to Morris County, employ the "Hope One" model which is an internationally awarded mental health and addiction strategy program, employing mental health clinicians, peer recovery specialists and Sheriff's Officers in an outreach capacity. "Connecting underage boys and girls with their parents and guardians and programs such as "Hope One" should be encouraged not discouraged," said Sheriff Gannon.

SANJ is also concerned about the inability to act upon the smell of marijuana or alcohol especially in the case of a first stop. What is the officer's liability should the driver cause an accident after receiving the "stern warning"? Although the legislation indicated juveniles cannot legally possess marijuana or alcohol, the initial warning provides no enforcement and potential harm to others and liability to the officer.

SANJ recognizes that the enactment of this legislation was not easy and took many, many months to accomplish. However, SANJ believes that we need to protect those underage boys and girls and not disincentivize the system from providing them with help. "Unfortunately, if a 14 year old child is found with under 5 ounces of cannabis or a bottle of vodka, the police officer can seize the marijuana or alcohol with a warning but can't tell the parent or guardian. I am sure this is not what was intended" said Sheriff Gannon.

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