

JAKE WHEATLEY, JR., MEMBER

36 EAST WING
P.O. BOX 202019
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120-2019
19TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT: (717) 783-3783
FINANCE COMMITTEE: (717) 783-1614
FAX: (717) 780-4753

2015-2017 CENTRE AVENUE, 1ST FLOOR
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15219
(412) 471-7760
FAX: (412) 471-8056

WEBSITE: WWW.PAHOUSE.COM/WHEATLEY
EMAIL: JWHEATLEY@PAHOUSE.NET



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN
FINANCE COMMITTEE

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE,
TREASURER

PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATIVE HUNGER CAUCUS,
CO-CHAIR

AFTERSCHOOL CAUCUS, CO-CHAIR

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
MEMBER

On Wednesday, Governor Tom Wolf and Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman held a news conference to officially release the findings of the Lt. Governor's listening tour on Cannabis across every county in Pennsylvania. The results were overwhelmingly clear. Pennsylvanians in every corner of the Commonwealth agree our policies on cannabis are outdated and just plain wrong. When it comes to treating cannabis as a Schedule 1 illicit drug, we are ready for change in the Commonwealth.

As you may know, I've already taken the lead by introducing House Bill 50, which would allow adult-use cannabis. The bill is a comprehensive effort to bring social justice change, state revenue and create a responsible and safely regulated market for cannabis in Pennsylvania. By the way, this is not groundbreaking, as 11 other states and Washington, D.C. have already fully legalized adult-use cannabis. While any change may have its bumps in the road, none of those states regret the decision and all are pointing to the numerous fiscal and social benefits as a result. I encourage everyone to take the time to find out more about my bill and all the significant policy changes we could affect by enacting House Bill 50.

The reason I felt it was so important to write this open letter, however, is because of how disappointed I am in the negative and dismissive response offered by House Republican leadership. First, I don't believe it accurately reflects the position of many of my colleagues across the aisle. Cannabis should not be a politically polarizing issue. We passed the Medical Cannabis Act in 2016 with overwhelming bipartisan support. I recognize full adult-use is not the same as medical cannabis, but House Republican leaders are not listening to the people they represent when they can't acknowledge the medical program's success should serve as our steppingstone, not the end of the discussion.

I also take serious issue with referencing the opioid crisis as if it should serve as a warning of what could happen if we legalize and regulate cannabis. They are clearly putting their head in the sand and not listening to so many who are in the process of rebuilding their lives having survived the grip of opioids. They tell us time after time that cannabis is perhaps the only thing that allows them any peace of mind and comfort as they face the daunting task of staying clean and living a life of recovery. Lieutenant Governor Fetterman told us one of the most difficult stories he heard repeatedly during his listening tour was a similar circumstance with veterans dealing with PTSD. Cannabis may not make them better, but it helps give them the ability to make it through as they try to deal with the anguish they're living with.

It's also constantly pointed out that adult-use cannabis would create an untenable situation for employers and employees. I don't know how alcohol is legal if that's the case. I couldn't disagree more

that anything would change for the significant number of people already using cannabis in their private lives, or more so those who currently don't use cannabis but would if it were legal, where suddenly they would be unable to recognize the responsibility they have not to be under the influence at work. I have yet to see a proposal for adult-use cannabis prohibiting employers from requiring employees to be sober while they're at work. That's the same for medical cannabis and it's the same for alcohol. Using that argument as a reason why we can't even have a conversation about cannabis is unacceptable.

Another falsehood House Republican leadership seems to think is adult-use cannabis supporters have any less concern for our youth. That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, it's hard to understand how providing an incentive for retailers to ensure it stays out of the hands of those under 21, and using revenue from the sales to provide more education, isn't a better way to protect our youth than keeping cannabis in the black market. What incentive is there for a drug dealer not to sell to children? I would argue there's currently a strong incentive to target our youth. If we created a legal, regulated market where retailers would face the prospect of losing their business if they're caught selling to minors, wouldn't that be a more effective way to protect our youth? We need to be honest and open with our children and tell them why they aren't ready to handle cannabis. Not demonize it and create an allure of the unknown and leave them unprepared to handle when they face the situation where it becomes available to them.

Again, I want to reiterate how disappointing it is the Republican leadership is denying all of us an opportunity to discuss these issues and many more when it comes to cannabis in Pennsylvania. Even if not all my colleagues are ready to vote on House Bill 50, they are preventing us from having public hearings on my bill where we could honestly talk about it and have a genuine opportunity to learn about what could be accomplished. I hope you're as bothered by this as I am, and it encourages you to speak up and speak out and let House Republican leadership know how disappointed you are too.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jake Wheatley, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jake Wheatley, Jr.
State Representative
19th Legislative District