

# Opinion: Colorado shows what's wrong with legalizing pot

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(Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., has introduced the Marijuana Justice Act in an effort to legalize marijuana across the nation. This is the furthest-reaching legalization effort to date and marks another sad moment in our nation's embrace of a drug that will have generational consequences.

Our country is facing a drug epidemic. Legalizing recreational marijuana will do nothing that Booker expects. We heard many of these same promises in 2012 when Colorado legalized recreational marijuana.

Since then, Colorado has seen an increase in marijuana-related traffic deaths, poison control calls and emergency room visits. The marijuana black market has increased in Colorado, not decreased. And numerous state marijuana regulators have been indicted for corruption.

In fiscal 2016, marijuana tax revenue was \$156,701,018. The total tax revenue for Colorado was \$13,327,123,798 – making marijuana only 1.18 percent of the state's tax revenue.

The price of marijuana legalization in public awareness campaigns, law enforcement, health care treatment, addiction recovery and preventative work is an unknown cost to date.

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Booker stated his reason for legalizing marijuana is to reduce "marijuana arrests happening so much in our country, targeting certain communities -- poor communities, minority communities." It's a noble cause, but legalizing marijuana has had the opposite effect.

According to the Colorado Department of Public Safety, arrests of black and Latino youth for marijuana possession have increased 58 percent and 29 percent, respectively, after legalization.

Furthermore, a vast majority of Colorado's marijuana businesses are concentrated in neighborhoods of color. Leaders from these communities, many of whom initially voted to legalize recreational marijuana, often speak out about the negative impacts of these businesses.

Booker released his bill just days after The Washington Post reported on a study that found "college students with access to recreational cannabis on average earn worse grades and fail classes at a higher rate." Getting off marijuana especially helped lower-performing students who were at risk of dropping out.

Since Colorado legalized marijuana, the state's youth marijuana use rate is the highest in the nation, 74 percent higher than the national average, according to the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Report. This is having terribly negative effects on the education of our youth.

The true impact of marijuana on our communities is just starting to be learned. The negative consequences of legalizing recreational marijuana will be felt for generations.

I encourage Booker to spend time with parents, educators, law enforcement, counselors, community leaders, pastors and legislators before rushing to legalize marijuana nationally.



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We've seen the effects in our neighborhoods in Colorado, and this is nothing we wish upon the nation.

*Jeff Hunt is the vice president of public policy at Colorado Christian University.*

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