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President C.D. Mote, Jr.  
Office of the President  
Main Administration Building  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742-5025

April 8, 2009

Dear President Mote:

As an endorser of the Amethyst Initiative, you are certainly aware of the widespread problems associated with alcohol use on and around our nation's college and university campuses. In fact, it is your appreciation of alcohol's harms that likely inspired you to support a national debate regarding the effectiveness of the legal drinking age and whether lowering it would reduce dangerous drinking by college students. It is my sincere hope that your openness to such bold policy reforms to address alcohol-related problems in our society will compel you to support a similar campaign – the Emerald Initiative.

**The Emerald Initiative** is based on one simple, objective fact: Marijuana is less harmful than alcohol both to the user and to society. Accordingly, proponents of the Emerald Initiative believe that adults should be allowed to use the less harmful of the two substances responsibly without fear of punishment, and – at the very least – colleges' and universities' penalties for student marijuana use should be no greater than those for student alcohol use. After all, where penalties for marijuana exceed penalties for alcohol, students are being driven to drink instead of making a rational, safer choice to use marijuana.

**Please consider the following facts:**

- Alcohol use is potentially lethal. In fact, alcohol use results in the overdose deaths of hundreds of Americans each year -- and far too often these deaths occur on college and university campuses. Yet there has never been a single marijuana overdose death in history. (Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003; *The American Scientist*, 2006)
- Alcohol use contributes to about 599,000 unintentional student injuries each year. According to scientific research, "Cannabis differs from alcohol ... in one major respect. It does not seem to increase risk-taking behavior. This means that cannabis rarely contributes to violence either to others or to oneself, whereas alcohol use is a major factor in deliberate self-harm, domestic accidents and violence." (Sources: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Task Force on College Drinking, 2007; British Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2002)

***If marijuana is safer, why is the government driving us to drink?***

- Alcohol use is a contributing factor in incidents of violent crime and aggressive behavior. The National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse estimated that alcohol is involved in 95 percent of assaults and 90 percent of sexual assaults involving college students. Each year there are about 696,000 alcohol-related assaults and about 97,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults involving students. There is NO evidence of marijuana being a contributing factor in such behavior or incidents. In fact, studies on the subject have determined that "Alcohol is clearly the drug with the most evidence to support a direct intoxication–violence relationship..." and "Cannabis reduces likelihood of violence during intoxication..." (Sources: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 1994; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Task Force on College Drinking, 2007; *Addictive Behaviors*, 2003)
- Marijuana is far less addictive than marijuana in terms of physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms, as well as symptoms such as dependency, reinforcement, and level of intoxication. (Sources: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1994)

Higher education officials nationwide recognize that students will inevitably use alcohol one way or another. This is why they generally do not consider promoting abstinence or enforcing zero-tolerance policies viable strategies. Instead, they typically encourage students to drink in moderation (oftentimes by promoting “social norms”). Other leaders, such as you, have suggested that allowing students to begin using alcohol legally at the age of 18 could lead to more responsible drinking.

The mission of the Emerald Initiative is to broaden the discussion on college drinking so that we do not simply debate how to get students to drink responsibly, but also have an intelligent dialogue about the benefits of encouraging them to “party responsibly.” Would it be more effective, we ask, to provide students with an alternative to alcohol instead of just encouraging them to use less when they drink?

**I hope you will join our call for a national debate about the possibility of reducing penalties for the use and possession of marijuana as a means of reducing alcohol use and abuse. To do so, please sign the Emerald Initiative statement provided herein. Regardless of whether you are prepared to sign the statement at this time, I would greatly appreciate it if you or another official at your school could fill out the enclosed survey. It will help us assess whether more problems on campuses are caused by the use of alcohol or marijuana.**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Emerald Initiative, the broader SAFER Campuses Initiative, or Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation (SAFER), please do not hesitate to contact me at 303-861-0033 or [mason@saferchoice.org](mailto:mason@saferchoice.org).

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request, as well as for your commitment to reducing the harm associated with alcohol use on and around our nation’s college and university campuses.

Sincerely,

*Mason Tvert*

Mason Tvert  
Executive Director  
Safer Alternative For Enjoyable Recreation (SAFER)