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Chancellor Philip P. DiStefano  
Office of the Chancellor  
University Administrative Center  
914 Broadway  
Boulder, CO 80309

April 8, 2009

Dear Chancellor DiStefano:

As you may or may not be aware, students at the University of Colorado at Boulder voted overwhelmingly in support of a campus-wide “SAFER Referendum” in Spring 2005. The measure demonstrated the student body’s opinion that University sanctions for marijuana use should be no greater than those for alcohol use, and that the University should conduct a study to determine whether such a policy would reduce the prevalence of alcohol-related problems among the student population.

The University has not complied with the SAFER Referendum up to this point, and it has yet to provide an explanation for its refusal to evaluate a student-endorsed proposal aimed at curbing dangerous drinking on and around campus. It is my sincere hope that you will be compelled to make good on the University’s side of the student referendum bargain and consider supporting the Emerald Initiative or – at the very least – use the enclosed survey to explain why you will not.

**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.”

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

(Sources: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Task Force on College Drinking, 2007; British Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2002)

- 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”), and some university leaders have suggested that students begin using alcohol legally at the age of 18 to learn more responsible drinking habits.

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)