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Powell: Enforcement Plays Vital Role in Drug Crisis

INDIANAPOLIS (August 24, 2017) – The Indiana Commission to Combat Drug Abuse heard today a law enforcement perspective on the opioid and drug crisis.

Commission Member David Powell, executive director of the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council, discussed synthetic drug dangers, the impact of current drug penalties and he asked the commission to help halt marijuana legalization efforts.

Powell said synthetic versions of controlled substances avoid classification as an illicit drug because they have a slightly altered molecular structure, they avoid detection by traditional means and the possibilities of alteration of synthetic drugs are literally endless. “Illicit manufacturers can produce new drugs faster than they can be scheduled by authorities,” he said. Additionally, the medical costs of synthetic drug poisoning averages \$25,600 per poisoning admission.

Despite the highly dangerous nature of synthetic drugs in Indiana, criminally, they are carved out for special penalty treatment and are treated as infractions and misdemeanor offenses. He urged that persons charged with synthetic drug possession or dealing be charged at the same level as any other Schedule I controlled substance.

Concerning current drug penalties in the state, Powell noted that commitments to the Indiana Department of Corrections by persons who have committed new crimes have been decreasing but parole and probation violations have increased in some cases. “Why are we not stopping this recidivism train that’s happening?” he asked.

In regards to marijuana legalization proposals that might come before the Indiana legislature during its 2018 session, Powell urged the commission to study lessons learned in Washington and Colorado from those states’ legalization experiments. Businesses and industry in states with legal marijuana are having trouble finding employees who can pass drug tests. Additionally, the overall number of traffic deaths related to marijuana has risen sharply in Colorado. Emergency-related poison control calls have also risen in Washington (68%) and Colorado (109%).

Powell noted that overall use of marijuana by youth, ages 12-17 is much greater in Washington and Colorado than the national average. “It is worrisome,” he said, “that 40% of American kids today think people drive better when they are high.”

Powell urged the commission to access the online publication “[Lessons Learned After 4 Years of Marijuana Legalization](#)” from the organization Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

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