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**Testimony in Opposition of SB 556 before the Senate Committee on Health
Care Strategies**

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Prevention and Recovery Services
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Chairperson Wagle and Members of the Committee,

I appear today on behalf of Shawnee Regional Prevention and Recovery Services and the Safe Streets Coalition of Topeka-Shawnee County. I am a Certified Prevention Professional and have worked in substance abuse prevention for 12 years. I currently serve as the State Coordinator for the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project and work at the state and local level with the Kansas Alliance for Drug Endangered Children.

Medical marijuana is the pro-legalization movement's way of gaining a foothold in our state. The Food and Drug Administration, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Office of National Drug Policy all oppose the use of smoked marijuana for medical purposes. Is it legitimate to prescribe a drug with over 400 carcinogens as a medical treatment?

As a prevention professional, one of my main concerns about medical marijuana is the message it sends to our youth. The message is that it is legal in some cases and it may have benefits. This is the wrong message. Shawnee County has one of the highest youth marijuana usage rates in the state with 45.8% of high school seniors having tried it at least once in their lifetime and 22.6% of high school seniors having used within the past 30 days. This is much higher than the state level of 36.7% and 16.6% respectively. Additionally, 59.4% of high school seniors in Shawnee County reported that one of their best friends had used marijuana within the past year. Every day in the United States, 3,577 youth try marijuana for the first time and 586,454 teens used marijuana. As a representative of the Safe Streets Coalition, I would like to report that significant progress has been made in addressing crime and safety issues in the community with a push to make Topeka the Safest Capital City (population 100,000 and above). Now is not the time to adopt legislation that will cause increased problems in our community.

In FY 2007, marijuana accounted for over 26% of treatment admissions (3,916 Kansas residents) to state-funded treatment organizations. If marijuana becomes legalized and normalized in Kansas what will happen to those numbers? Does Kansas have the treatment capacity to handle more marijuana addiction? History has shown that legalization increases addiction rates which is demonstrated by the fact that alcohol was the number one problem at admission to state-funded treatment organizations in FY2007.

Last year, I appeared before the Kansas Legislature testifying in favor of changes to the drug paraphernalia statute. Thank you for passing the legislation. It has made a huge difference in Kansas communities to the point where in some cases, 100% of stores have removed paraphernalia, including paraphernalia used for smoking marijuana. This statute was a huge step forward for communities to address marijuana and other drugs. I believe SB 556 is a huge step backwards and I urge you not to pass this legislation.

On a personal note, my family was devastated two years ago when my dad was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. He has suffered many debilitating symptoms as a result of the cancer and treatment. If my dad asked me if medical marijuana would provide him comfort, I would, without hesitation, tell him that marijuana has no medical value and there are many better, more effective treatment options. My heart goes out to patients and families who have conditions that they think will be relieved by marijuana. Medical marijuana is not the answer and has no place in healthy communities. Please help keep Kansas communities healthy and safe.