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Dear People of the Diocese of Baker,

Together with Archbishop Sample of Portland and the Oregon Catholic Conference I urge you to vote NO on Measure 91, which would legalize recreational marijuana use in the state of Oregon.

Today's marijuana has been genetically engineered to have much more potent intoxicating effects than it did 40 years ago, and young people are particularly vulnerable to it. The normal development of the adolescent brain can be seriously altered by its heightened susceptibility to marijuana addiction. But addiction is not the only concern. Adults who smoke or ingest marijuana infrequently cannot know in advance how much it may impair their judgment and lead to behavior they would otherwise avoid. For example, one study found that twelve- to seventeen-year-old marijuana users were more likely to sell drugs, steal, and take part in acts of violence—the kinds of illegal activity for which most marijuana offenders, young and old, are incarcerated. And even perfectly legal behavior induced by marijuana can produce unexpectedly negative life-long effects, for adults as well as for youth.

Measure 91 is a societal experiment whose outcomes cannot be foreseen with certainty. But we can be sure that it will put new obstacles in the path of growing up, and many young people will stumble and fall along the way. The Governor of Colorado has admitted that voters in his state were “reckless” in legalizing marijuana there. Oregonians would do well to wait and see how Colorado's and Washington's experiments play out in the next few years and not rush to follow them into the unknown.

In urging a YES vote on Measure 88 (the Oregon Driver's Card), I noted that Catholics are not obliged to follow their bishop on a matter of prudential judgment. That is true for Measure 91 as well. But I do encourage you to look into it carefully and withhold your support for marijuana legalization.

Grace to you and peace in the Lord,

+ Liam Cary

Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker

