

Contact

Rebecca Elwell
Coordinator, Tiverton Prevention Coalition
401-835-5311
rebecca@tivertonprevention.org

Tiverton Prevention Coalition Announces Marijuana Summit on June 19

Tiverton, RI. May 28, 2013 – The Tiverton Prevention Coalition voted unanimously at its April meeting to invest monies from its five-year Drug Free Communities grant to plan and conduct a Tiverton Marijuana Summit on June 19. The coalition hopes the summit will be the first step in developing a broad action plan that will prevent or reduce the risk of “unintended consequences” that the state’s marijuana laws can have on Rhode Island communities.

Coalition coordinator Rebecca Elwell emphasized that “the summit is not a pro or con event. We see the summit as community leaders coming together to consider how the unintended consequences of decriminalization, the opening of marijuana dispensaries and loopholes in Medical Marijuana Act can affect the Town’s health and safety. Then, we’ll brainstorm about what Tiverton can do proactively to protect the community, especially youth, from possible harm. It’s the basic prevention model: identify potential risks, provide evidence that the risks are real and engage the community to discuss how we can work together to reduce identified risks.”

Tiverton is already on the map of U.S. communities where the rate of youth marijuana use is higher than both national and state averages, Elwell said. Last year the Coalition received a three-year block grant, in addition to the DFC grant, to develop strategies and programs to reduce marijuana use among Tiverton teens.

What are some of those “unintended consequences?” Elwell explained that decriminalization in other states has been shown to reduce perception of harm among youth, “which we know increases use,” Elwell said. “We also know that growing marijuana indoors, which is mandated by the Medical Marijuana Act, can expose tenants, property owners, neighborhoods, police and firefighters to increased risk of fire and property damage. Working together, we can create local ordinances, regulations, policies and educational programs that will prevent or reduce these unintended consequences in Tiverton.”

The summit deploys the prevention model used by all DFC grantees. Evidence shows that engaging leaders in 12 key community sectors is the most effective way to prevent and reduce harms associated with substance abuse, Elwell said. The sectors include police, fire, education and zoning departments; seniors; faith communities; and civic, business, substance abuse treatment, Scouting, youth athletic and parent-teacher organizations. DFC coordinators learn to implement this community-wide model through extensive training by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America.

Edith Borden, Coalition chair and a student assistance counselor at Tiverton's middle and high schools, said, "I can see how marijuana is affecting the students I work with on a daily basis. However, the larger community is also being affected and it is important that we work together to develop ordinances and policies to reduce potential harm"

"We are inviting leaders from all key sectors," Elwell added, "because evidence shows that this model produces change that makes communities healthier and safer places to live and raise families. In the process Tiverton may well become a model for how a RI community can protect its residents from the unintended consequences of state's marijuana legislation."

— END —