

Model Response

It's clear that Mr. Franklin and his organization are in favor of legalizing the recreational use of marijuana in Midland. However, it's not clear that he or his group have strong support for their claims. Further, the organization comes across as very political and confrontational and this doesn't seem to be the best way for them to accomplish their goals. In this essay I critically examine each of the documents and, throughout my examination, address the positions I was requested to consider. When relevant, I offer suggestions for the strengthening of Mr. Franklin's (or the organization's) claims.

The flier that *Make Pot Legal Now!* distributed at the park is not informative and instead actually distracts from the issues at hand. Most of the seven claims are spurious or, at best, in need of support. No evidence is given on the flier, and no references are made available, for anyone to check the claims. For example, the Institute of Medicine might, in fact, have endorsed the medical use of marijuana, but, there's no reason why this fact (if it's a fact) has anything to do with why pot should be legalized for recreational use. Worse, the headline of the flier attacks the governor. If you want a proposal to be accepted by the people and if you want people to vote for it, attacking the governor isn't the best way to go about that – you've just eliminated at least tens of thousands of potential voters and supporters. There are some claims on the flier that are worth investigating. For instance, the flier suggests that legal pot will increase revenue and reduce tax-payer burdens. If these claims are true, then those might be reasons for everyday voters to vote yes on the proposal. (Relevantly, the language of the proposal isn't found in any of these documents, leading me to believe that the wording itself isn't all that strong, which makes me all the more suspect. Given how important such support would be, I expected to find supporting documentation; as I haven't, I assume it doesn't exist.)

Mr. Franklin's support for his revenue claims (and associated benefits to society through lower arrests claims) are poorly summarized in the chart that he referenced. The graph itself is correct, as far as that goes, but, it suggests that, as the number of recreational users goes up, the number of drug-related arrests goes down. There are many problems with this. First, the data for the number of recreational users (as per the document from the political science department here at Midland) was gathered in a way that's not very good – asking people at a summer music festival if they're recreational drug users is not really good methodology. Second, all the graph really shows is that, in these five ZIP codes, we can say that, for each place, there is both a specific number of self-reported recreational users and a specific percentage of police-reported arrests. Not only is there no hint of a causal relationship, there isn't even really a hint of a correlation. Mr. Franklin's suggestion that taxpayers will save money because there will be fewer arrests just doesn't follow. (I mean, the graph makes it look like it, a little, but it's just a trick.)

The tables on the document provided by the political science department are useful, but not really supportive of the organization's aims. There are suggestions of trends, but, it really says more about what kinds of neighborhoods have what kinds of residents. For all we know, this information could be used to support racial or ethnic claims, etc. It's data, but it's data without much support. Knowing that more people live in 49123 than in 49108 doesn't really tell us much. Knowing that the smaller of those two areas has more self-reported recreational users doesn't tell us much because of the way the data was gathered. The arrest percentages are interesting, and very similar (which probably makes sense since the populations aren't much different in size).

The article from the Gazette sounds like the usual kind of article written to both inform readers and sell newspapers. The title is catchy. However, we're left wondering if Mr. Franklin is right when he says that this is what the people want. The writer of the piece didn't provide any more information (at least, not in the little bit of information to which I had access while preparing this report) on that topic. I don't know what the people want, I'm not sure that Mr. Franklin knows what the people want, but it's pretty clear what Mr. Franklin wants and he seems willing to act like a typical politician in telling us what the people want.

Again, he attacks the governor here. This is a weak position. He could have given a better interview and allowed the newspaper to publish a better story. If he'd said something like "I've talked to hundreds of people and most of them support our ideas," or if he'd at least suggested that the government in Midland should be willing to take a look at legalization, I think he'd have made a stronger claim. As it is, he seems to have really hurt his chances by being so confrontational.

The research brief is about the only document of the five I received that has any really objective information. If Mr. Franklin had said the kinds of things that Mr. Smallson said, he might have more supporters. Even though Midland is neither Washington nor Colorado, it is possible that some of the trends supported by members of other states would be trends supported by members of Midland. Based on the little bit of information on that page, Centertown and West Bend might have enough similarities that Mr. Franklin and his group might have been able to put together something more persuasive. At the very least, he could have led the people he's trying to get to support the ballot proposal to suggestive evidence that supports his ideas.

Whether the legalization of marijuana will have beneficial social or economic effects, or whether the people of Midland actually want marijuana to be legalized, is hard to determine from what's been provided. Based only on the research brief, it seems reasonable to research this issue, after all, if the legalization in other states has been beneficial there it might be beneficial here. That said, as what's proposed here is to make something the law through a ballot proposal, more work needs to be done than is being done by Mr. Franklin's organization to inform the voters who could then make that happen.