

The myth that prostitution consists of two consenting adults

I hear often on social media, “who cares what two consenting adults do?” anytime prostitution is brought up on **New Bedford Guide’s Facebook page**. The idea that prostitutes in New Bedford, or in America, are consenting adults is a myth and is a lazy way to look the other way or even condoning the sex trade.

I served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force and visited or lived in 22 different countries. The Air Force takes prostitution seriously and educates their personnel with briefings when they visit areas with high prostitution. When you get stationed in countries like Thailand or South Korea, there is required training on human trafficking and sexually transmitted diseases. Showing slides of STDs on faces and genitals is generally enough to scare the soldiers to think twice when hiring a prostitute. There is also the human side.

Human trafficking is real and hundreds of thousands of women, and some cases men, are forced into prostitution. Girls in poor countries are lured into the prostitution world through ads in their local papers with false offers of real jobs. In Thailand and much of Europe it’s clear-cut, the governments officially or unofficially condone prostitution, but in most countries prostitution is an underground trade.

In places like New Bedford, you’ll find working girls controlled by pimps and usually a need to feed their addiction. Either way, prostitutes are far from consenting adults in the way they are in Amsterdam where the women have unions and get government protection.

As long as there is poverty and addiction there will be

prostitution – especially when men continue to demand it. It's important to educate yourself on why most prostitutes sell their body to strange men for so little money. When you are on social media condoning prostitution as "two consenting adults," you are contributing to the sex trade. Men need to learn that it is not acceptable, in real life or on social media, if we are to end prostitution in our area and get these women the help they need.

Apathy is the main problem with New Bedford, not crime

If I was forced to describe New Bedford in one word, I would select apathetic. Apathy is defined as "lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern," and that describes much of the New Bedford population very accurately. It's the root cause of most of New Bedford's problems, especially crime.

First, there is an extreme lack of interest in politics in New Bedford. While most voting age residents are registered to vote, very few do and most politicians from the municipal to the state level run unopposed. When was the last time someone ran against Tony Cabral or Mark Montigny? In 2013, New Bedford mayor Jon Mitchell ran unopposed. Most of your ward City Councillors run unopposed or face weak opposition. How do you expect things to change if the leadership doesn't?

Second, while New Bedford residents are very concerned about crime on social media, there is a large segment of the population that looks away when crime occurs. "No snitching" is a problem in the worst neighborhoods of the city. The bigger issue of drugs, prostitution and violent crime have

become an acceptable way of life on some streets. The police and politicians can only do so much – residents stepping up to clean their own streets is the only true way to clean up a bad neighborhood.

Third, while there are some great residents that step up to make their community better, too many don't. Complaining on social media about a dirty street is easier than actually organizing and participating in a clean up. It seems to be the same amazing people that organize and participate in the clean ups and the same people that complain on social media while doing nothing impact in real life.

Fourth, too many New Bedford parents lack interest in their children's lives. Too many teenagers are out late at night past responsible hours and very few parents show up to important school meetings. It's embarrassing seeing a dozen parents at New Bedford High School public forums with a student body of over 2,000 students. Involved parents and keeping kids active in healthy activities are the only real ways to prevent kids hanging out with the wrong crowds.

Finally, once the citizens and police do their job, it's up to the judges that sit in the New Bedford court rooms to take sentencing seriously. No criminal fears the New Bedford judicial system, it's one big joke. It's tough to convince people in bad neighborhoods to report crime if the judges just release them the next day. It's the good people in the bad neighborhoods that have to live with the criminals and the revenge they take on "snitches."

Remove the apathy from New Bedford and you'll remove much of the crime. When our youth have involved parents, adults are active in their political process, judges take sentencing seriously, and residents take pride in their neighborhood, things will improve.

Is addiction a disease? Yes, but it's a disease of choice

We posted a **video on our Facebook page** showing a man pushing the notion that addiction is not a disease and that by calling addiction a disease you are enabling users. The arguments that followed in the comment section mostly fought over the question, is addiction a disease? Most people missed the main point of the video – that addiction is a choice and for this article I'll call addiction a disease by choice.

By the exact definition of the word, a drug addict has a disease. Per **Webster dictionary online**:

“A condition of the living animal or plant body or of one of its parts that impairs normal functioning and is typically manifested by distinguishing signs and symptoms or a harmful development.”

It's hard to argue by that definition that addiction isn't a disease, but the point of the video is that by classifying addiction in the same light as cancer, it's actually harmful to the addict by giving them an excuse – it's not your fault, you have a disease. You can't simply choose to stop having cancer, but you can right away choose to stop using a drug. Millions do it every day, by never trying addictive drugs or by deciding to not use them any longer. The vast majority of us choose not to take that first hit. There isn't a drug addict alive today that didn't know heroin was addictive before putting that first needle in their arm. That's not the case with most wide-spread diseases. One could live a healthy lifestyle and be diagnosed with cancer – lung cancer kills a lot of non-smokers and so many cancers are hereditary.

Addiction is a disease by choice. Never in the history of mankind has a drug addict become addicted without trying the drug. You will never go to bed a non-addict, never have tried heroin, and wake up suddenly addicted to heroin. You are hit on the head over and over about the dangers and addictive qualities of hard drugs, yet people still choose that first hit. The main difference between an addicted drug user and a non-user is addicts decided to take that first hit. It's that simple.

Some will say, "but Mike, you aren't a doctor, how can you even have an opinion?" Well, while I respect most doctors, hospital errors are the third leading cause of death in U.S. – **killing 440,000 Americans annually**. Pharmaceutical companies and doctors also played a major role in creating the opioid crisis by over prescribing opioids. History shows doctors recommending cigarettes and telling us that with a huge marketing campaign in the 90's that opioid pain medication wasn't addictive. And who is making money curing addicts? Doctors. I appreciate and love what most doctors do, but let's not act like they are the only ones entitled to an opinion on addiction.

Many people who have had family members die from cancer get upset when people call addiction a disease. They've seen young children die from a disease they had no choice in getting. They also see drug addiction as a choice and it is. For every drug addict that chooses to use drugs for depression, I can show you thousands of people equally depressed that found other ways to cope. Drug addiction is the easy way out and friends and family members ease the burden by classify drug use as a disease as to shift blame – my brother is an addict because of a disease, not by his choice. As the video states, that's enabling and allowing the addict to push away any personal responsibility and truly end his addiction.

That's not to say that drug addicts don't deserve our love and help. No one should suffer a lifetime of suffering based on a

bad choice, bad disease choice to be exact.

Do you suffer with addiction or know someone that does? Visit <http://www.paaca.org/>

My confrontation with a future New Bedford murder suspect and her victim

I've been wanting to write this story for two years now, but for legal reasons couldn't. On a cold October in 2015, I was attacked by an angry couple for attempting to help a young child that was being abused. Why can I write it now? Because the man is dead and the female is a suspect in his murder.

On September 18th, 23-year old **Zaishary Gonzalez** was **arraigned for the murder of 45-year-old Juan Roman**. According to witnesses on the scene, Zaishary arrived Nauset Street to confront Juan about a personal issue, **when she smashed his car windows, sliced all four tires and then fatally stabbed him**. She then allegedly threatened a female witness to keep quiet on the scene before fleeing. Police arrested her at her home and she will now stand trial for murder, witness intimidation and malicious destruction of a motor vehicle.

Now let's rewind back almost two years early to a late October night when I had a run in with the murder suspect and victim. I parked my car on Purchase Street in downtown New Bedford across from The Green Bean coffee shop. I was about a half hour early from covering the debate between Mayor Jon Mitchell and candidate Maria Giesta at the Z at 7pm.

After parking my car, I heard a woman screaming and swearing loudly. It's not uncommon to hear shouting downtown, so I didn't think much of it until I got out of my car and the screaming continued. I looked over toward Green Bean where a screaming woman had a small child pinned against the glass of the cafe. It was cold – he had an over-sized jacket and was crying and screaming. A man with a bicycle was standing near the woman and appeared to be overseeing the interaction. People looked, but simply walked past.

I approached the three and simply said, "Hey, what's going on?"

The man, who would turn out to be Juan Roman, turned immediately, stepped a few inches from my face shouted, "Who the fuck are you? Get the fuck out of here!"

I stood my ground and didn't budge an inch, but noticed a switch (a thin, but sturdy piece of bamboo used to whip an animal or a kid) in his right hand. I told him that I wasn't going anywhere until I knew what was going on with the child. Because of the switch, I didn't notice the woman, who turned out to be Zaishary Gonzalez.

Zaishary threw a punch over Juan's shoulder, hitting me in the face. As I backed up Juan swung his switch twice, hitting my arm twice as I blocked the blows and once in the face, barely missing my eye.

When he reached up to swing a third time, I punched him square in the jaw, sending him back. I used to box and train mixed martial arts, and Juan realized he was in trouble, and like most cowards, pulled a knife out of his pocket.

Facing Juan, I backed up slowly towards my car where I had left my cell phone. He stalked me across the street, but kept his distance. One of the BCC police officer arrived and I told him, "He has a knife, be careful."

Juan immediately dropped the switch and started walking towards No Problem where Zaishary already was with her child. The BCC officer, his hand on his holster followed Juan and ordered him to stay. That's when the New Bedford police arrived. I told them what happened and an independent witness corroborated everything I told them and tell you now.

The first words out of Zaishary's mouth was "I already have DCF on my ass. I don't need this shit." Juan complained about his sore jaw as the police cuffed him and put him in the back of the cruiser. After questioning Zaishary, the police let her go home with the child. After finishing up with the police I called DCF to make a report.

The next two years were a painful process with the Bristol County justice system. I had to appear at the courthouse a dozen times for the two separate cases. Zaishary was being charged with petty assault and Juan was being charged with two cases of aggravated assault – one for the switch and one for the knife. Juan's court appointed lawyer found every reason in the world to continue the case and the judges were more than happy to continue.

A notable instance with Zaishary was during the magistrate hearing where they would determine if there was enough evidence to proceed. After 10 minutes of lying, she finally got angry. The magistrate asked her if she had hit her son, and her response in an agitated voice was, "I will discipline my child how I see fit. No police or judge will tell me what to do." Needless to say, the magistrate decided he had enough and told her to leave and for me to leave five minutes later. There was enough evidence to proceed. I never did get to face her in court.

After a half dozen appearances to the courthouse for Juan's case, he finally plead guilty to both counts of aggravated assault. This happened even after the court appointed lawyers tried to intimidate me with, "You know, you did hit him back.

If he is found innocent, the County could charge you with assault.” They even gave me a weak court appointed lawyer who seemed more interested in me dropping the case than serving me. I could only guess his buddy was Juan’s court-appointed lawyer. Needless to say, I told him to go away and proceeded. 30 minutes later Juan plead guilty.

When Zaishary allegedly stabbed Juan to death, I still had a open case against her. I’ll never forget the day I was sitting in a coffee shop and got the **press release** from the Bristol DA’s office reporting the murder. As I read through the press release I couldn’t believe the names Zaishary Gonzalez and Juan Roman were listed as the suspect and victim in a New Bedford murder. I couldn’t believe the video I saw later of Zaishary calmly being lead away to the police car.

It turns out that Zaishary is an angry person that can’t control her violence. According to her, DCF was on her before I met her that night. A few days after the attack on me, I mistakenly ran into her on Purchase Street where she grew violent, started yelling and then got on her phone and proceeded to follow me to my car. Who was she calling and why? I’ll never know.

About two weeks after Juan was killed, I received a letter from the DA’s office saying there was no further action being taken against him because he was dead. The automatic restraining order on him and his parole was dropped.

Thus is the end of my dealing with Juan and Zaishary, a sad ending to a angry couple and now an innocent child live life without a mother. I can’t help but feel the boy is better off.

Why I Love New Bedford

Russell is one of the nicest and most genuine people I've met in my 22 years in New Bedford. He works long, strenuous hours with his hands from Monday through Friday on Martha's Vineyard. He gets up before the sun rises, and travels home to New Bedford long after dusk falls. He is a young man in his 20's, and his daily grind is as relentless as his love for his friends and family. And whether he realizes it or not, he is an inspiration to me and my loved ones. Because despite the difficulties life continues to throw at Russell, he gets up the next morning and instinctively understands what must be done for the sake of what matters most; work, family, and love.

I love New Bedford because it is home to so many people like Russell. New Bedford is home to so many people who have had to brush off the hardships they've faced in preparation for new challenges ahead. New Bedford is home to so many people whose daily triumphs go unnoticed. New Bedford is home to a vast body of people who amidst the most heartbreaking stories from around the city, state, and country, continue to commit the smallest acts of kindness towards their neighbor. New Bedford is home to so many people who continue to pursue better lives despite negativity's incessant attempts to swallow them whole.



While it may be easy to overlook a stranger's opening of a door or a driver's yielding to a family with groceries in a crosswalk, these small acts of kindness are as prevalent in New Bedford as anywhere else in America. These small acts of kindness are what makes life worth living in New Bedford, because ultimately they are what fuels others to continue to respond to hate with love. In a country where bad things happen regularly, it is more important now than ever for people to continue to inspire positive action amongst others. Even in the most mundane situations. Because while you may not be able to control what happens around you, you do have the power to choose how you respond to what happens around you. And you never know how your actions can affect somebody else's going forward.

I met Russell through a mutual friend of ours a few months ago. Our friend lives in a building that is mostly occupied by elderly folks, and we encountered an older man named Richie who was having a hard time loading his wheelchair into his van. Richie had been fixing a friend's car overseas years ago, when a stranger shot him in the back; putting Richie in a wheelchair for life.

Before I could even approach Richie, I saw Russell thrust himself towards the man's wheelchair to load it into the van. There was no introduction, no exchanging of pleasantries, and no reward; just one man acting out of kindness for another. And that man happened to be my friend Russell, who could not have looked happier on that day to be helping somebody in need. Russell didn't need a thank you, money, a name, or for Richie to remember his.



He just wanted to help.

If you're from New Bedford, you either know somebody who has

faced great pain in their lifetime, or you have fought that pain for yourself. If you're from New Bedford, there is a good chance that struggle runs in your family. There is a good chance that if you are from New Bedford, you've grown up in a family that has constantly been exposed to pain and suffering in some shape or form.

For people living in New Bedford, work is synonymous with life. We must work our tails off everyday because people we care about deeply directly depend on it. And if you're from New Bedford, you can understand just how much harder life could be if you and your loved ones didn't work your tails off. Because people in New Bedford can empathize with just how trying tough times can be for others in the city. All they have to do is look around.

I love New Bedford because it is my home. New Bedford has been where my most fondest memories have taken place. And while I am just 22 years old, I realize that meaningful life experiences can take place anywhere in the world. I have hiked the Flatirons in Colorado, walked the beaches of Washington state, and partied in downtown Las Vegas. And while these moments were life changing in the most positive of ways for me, they also made me realize that there really is no place like home. In time spent away from Massachusetts, I realized that there truly is no place like New Bedford. And so I came back home in a heartbeat.



I believe people in New Bedford are more connected to one another than they realize. I believe most of us want the same thing; work, family, and love. I believe most of us are good intentioned people caught up in a giant web of negativity that gets in the way of what we want most. Problems are inevitable, but problem solving can be difficult. And I believe most people in New Bedford live to solve problems; be it their own or those of another. I believe most people in New Bedford would rather see the next person's problem be solved as opposed to simply watching them fail. I believe Russell is not the only person in New Bedford who just wants to help.

I believe that the people I've seen hold doors open, pay for strangers' coffees, and smile from across the street, are not the only people in New Bedford paying small acts of kindness forward. Because given our similar upbringings and rough-edged east coast roots, we share a life-long bond. We share a bond by having grown up and lived in one of the most polarizing cities in American history. We share a bond by living in a place that at times can be stunningly beautiful and at other times can be shockingly terrifying. And this bond is what propels us to be better people to those around us.

I don't love New Bedford for its history. I don't love New Bedford for its beaches, parks and landmarks. I don't love New Bedford for its food, downtown, or airport. I don't love New Bedford for its sports, music, or art.

I was taught at a young age that the most powerful form of love is unconditional.

And so, I just love New Bedford.

Why do so many in New Bedford, hate New Bedford?

"We become what we think about." – Earl Nightingale

This is a great quote and reminds me of the many people that live in New Bedford that hate the city so much. Post something positive about the city and you'll have a long line of New Bedford residents tearing it down. There's a crab metaphor that perfectly represents these people:

"Individually, the crabs could easily escape from the pot, but instead, they grab at each other in a useless "king of the hill" competition which prevents any from escaping and ensures their collective demise."

Earlier this year I wrote an article title '**8 reasons New Bedford is a better destination than Newport**' – it wasn't an article saying that New Bedford was better than Newport, it was an article pointing out what I felt were 8 things that made New Bedford a better destination. I'm certain someone could provide more than eight reasons why Newport is a better destination, but that doesn't mean my reasons are any less

relevant.

Unfortunately, it was mostly New Bedford residents that chimed in on Facebook tearing apart the article. This wasn't an isolated case, almost anytime you post something positive about New Bedford, an army of crabs will swarm to tear it apart. We posted the article three times on our Facebook page **here**, **here** and **here**. Check out the comments for yourself – instead of Newport coming to defend Newport, it was New Bedford people defending Newport and verbally destroying New Bedford.

This seems to happen every time I try to portray New Bedford in a positive light. Tell people crime is down? Liar! Tell people unemployment is down? No way! Show people a new harbor walk? Why isn't that money used to fix the roads. It's a tiresome game.

Why do so many New Bedford residents like to tear down any positive news or articles about the city they live in? I guess the popular quote "misery loves company" would be appropriate. Miserable people simply like to make others miserable, instead of rising up to a positive level, they bring other people to their misery. Social media seems to bring out the worst people and they seem to be the most vocal.

My advice for miserable people that hate their city so much – move, keep quiet or contribute in a positive way. Do some soul searching and find out why you are so miserable. Go out of your way to be nice to others and see if it comes back to you. When you see something positive about your city on social media – like, share and comment on it. See something negative about your city? Offer improvements. We become what we think about, and our city becomes what its citizens think and talk about. Let's become a positive city, there's so much to love and be proud about.

Make sure you check out the comments on social media

responding to this article – you’ll see what I mean.

Newport

New Bedford crime – perception versus reality

There’s an annoying constant that you’ll find locally on social media; anytime someone reports crime on Facebook, someone will mock it with “crime is down” in the comment section. This mockery is in reference to FBI statistics reporting that **overall crime in New Bedford is down 31% from 2014-2016**. The allegations of New Bedford’s mayor and police force manipulating data is the most popular conspiracy. Another unfounded theory is that police are putting crimes in different categories than in previous years. Another theory is people aren’t reporting crime as much – as if they were eagerly reporting crime in the past.

Yes, homicides are up from three in 2016 to eight in 2017, but this doesn’t mean crime is up overall. And after two years of crime dropping, can we realistically expect it is continue? 99.99% of New Bedford residents aren’t murdered in New Bedford – most of the residents are impacted by smaller crimes like larceny, theft, vandalism and to a lesser extend assault, car thefts, sexual assaults and other violent crime. Also, the common themes of homicides in New Bedford pertain to domestic violence or are drug related. You’d be hard pressed to find anyone randomly murdered in New Bedford, but I digress.

Yes, it is possible, if not even likely after two years of declines, that overall crime is up in New Bedford for 2017 over 2016. By how much, we won’t know until next year. But why

do so many on social media act like New Bedford is just as bad as Chicago? The answer is simple, the rise of social media pages and groups with the primary focus of reporting New Bedford crime.

While New Bedford Guide has reduced its daily New Bedford crime reporting, other traditional media like WBSM and Standard Times have either increased their New Bedford crime reporting or continued to steadily report it. These are the media that have been around the longest in the area. Pages like New Bedford Live and groups like *New Bedford Neighborhood Watch 1*, *New Bedford Neighborhood Watch 2* and *New Bedford/Fall River community news and scans* have popped up over the past few years and almost exclusively report crime. That makes seven local media accounts with large following reporting crime daily, some more than others, through their social media accounts – mostly through Facebook.

If you are part of all or even some of these pages/groups, you are likely to see dozens of crime posts in your news feeds every day without fail. Sadly, crime sells and media is simply feeding what the population wants. New Bedford residents reward crime posts with engagement far more than any other posts on social media.

Let's take a 24-hour period on Facebook from the time of this writing, 7pm on Monday, November 13th. Here are the crimes posted by the 7 pages going back 24 hours:

New Bedford Guide: 2

SouthCoastToday: 8

WBSM: 5

New Bedford Live: 3

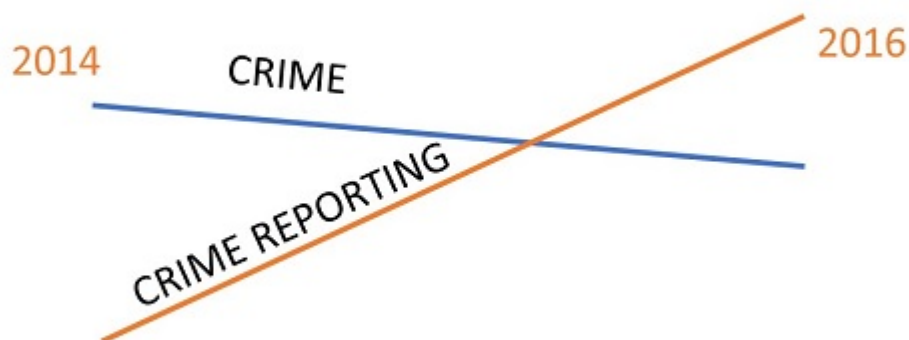
New Bedford Neighborhood Watch 1: 14

New Bedford Neighborhood Watch 2: ?

new bedford/fall river community news and scans: 3

I'm not a member of New Bedford Neighborhood Watch 2 any

longer, but let's use 5 for their New Bedford crime posts. That would bring the total to 40 new posts in a 24 hour period. Keep in mind most news organizations have a skeleton crew on Sunday nights, and it wouldn't be uncommon to see 80-100 combined posts from all seven of these groups/pages on a week day. This number also doesn't count that when you comment on an older post in Facebook groups, the post is immediately bumped to the top. Being conservative, let's say 50 crime posts are produced daily by these seven pages/groups on average, that would make 350 New Bedford crime posts per week or 1,400 every month. That's 16,800 crime posts per year. That's a lot of crime reporting injected into your daily life over the months and years.



New Bedford residents are split on whether this increased of crime reporting is a good or bad thing – some like to be informed on what's going on with all crime, others feel the spike in crime reporting puts New Bedford in an unfair negative light which kills tourism and makes it hard to recruit business. Arguing these points is not what this article is about. My goal is to simply inform readers on why crime could be down or up slightly, but you'd think New Bedford was suffering a crime wave the past few years. Even if

crime does turn out to be on the rise officially, it won't be at the level that is perceived. New Bedford residents are simply seeing a spike in reporting – all the major and sometimes minor crime flowing in with video and photos the capture and keep your attention.

OPINION: Highly Questionable – New Bedford Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro's Stance on Cannabis

Opinions are like... 'tailpipes'; everybody has got one, and they usually stink. We are all entitled to formulate our own opinions, just as we are also entitled to either adhere to or refute the opinions of others. The important thing is that collectively we continue to work towards a more fruitful existence as a society. Our disagreements are ultimately the beginning of our work towards a better life. And so I believe we owe it to ourselves to constantly be seeking new perspectives to expand our understanding of the world and humankind. We owe it to ourselves to ask questions.

And for those in positions of 'extended influence'-our societal decision makers-there is an added importance to understanding all points of view. For our medical professionals, politicians, legislators, and law enforcement, there is an added importance to not only asking questions-but to also be seeking new answers to those questions. Our decision makers must understand all points of views to the best of their ability.

And so, it is of vital importance that people such as New Bedford Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro seek new and more valid perspectives; specifically in regards to his highly questionable stance on cannabis and recreational cannabis regulation.

A couple of months ago, New Bedford Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro spoke with New Bedford Guide to address various city-wide issues. During the 30 minute interview, Chief Cordeiro was asked to address legal cannabis (medical and recreational) as a potential solution to the city's opioid problem. You can check out the full interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbsNeCdRRCI> (cannabis is brought up at the 19:30 mark in the video).

While acknowledging medical cannabis would be more 'frugal' for the city, Chief Cordeiro had a much different opinion when it came to recreational cannabis in New Bedford:

"I think the medicinal piece would probably be more frugal. But the recreational-I believe is going to compound our drug issues as a whole...It seems that the timing is off by throwing more gasoline into the fire when we are already struggling with an addiction issue across the country."

Chief Cordeiro also referenced Colorado as having 4x more "cannabis-driven" ER visits and an uptick in motor vehicle accidents since legalization of recreational marijuana. Additionally, when it comes to cannabis edibles, Cordeiro fears that a lack of being able to detect THC like alcohol in a person's system would make it harder to keep our streets safe. Recreational cannabis in New Bedford would also contribute towards the city's "social problems" according to Cordeiro, as he feels landlords and unsuspecting citizens would be subjected to being around a smoker's environment unwillingly.

Therefore, as a cannabis advocate, I wanted to take some time

to address Chief Cordeiro's seemingly misguided stance on cannabis.

Here are 5 questions for New Bedford Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro (and citizens) to consider:

Questions 1 and 2:

- How can one realistically compare cannabis and alcohol?*
- How exactly are roads unsafe because of cannabis?*

As far as the consumption of cannabis edibles goes, Chief Cordeiro is concerned that an inability to 'detect THC like alcohol' in a person's blood would potentially mean roadways would become unsafe. The fear is that the perceived simplicity of consuming cannabis edibles such as 'marijuana lolli-pops, candies, cookies, and traditional brownies' would drive people to consume an unsafe amount of THC while they operate motor vehicles- therefore causing more motor vehicle accidents and emergency room visits.

This would also suggest that a considerably large amount of drivers that have THC in their blood would be direct causes for an increase in motor vehicle accidents. Chief Cordeiro also cited Colorado as having 4 times as many state wide emergency room visits that were 'cannabis-driven', and increasing rates of motor vehicle accidents as well. Valid support for Chief Cordeiro's claims are lacking however, as studies show that despite finding more emergency room visits and additional motor vehicle accidents in states that have legalized recreational cannabis, there is no definitive factor linking them to cannabis specifically.

The fact is that many people who were admitted to Colorado emergency rooms with THC in their system also had traces of other drugs in their system; such as alcohol and opiates. And so, it is a stretch to suggest that these emergency visit increases are "cannabis-driven".

Earlier this year, researchers from the University of Texas at Austin published a study in the American Journal of Public Health that concluded there is “no evidence to suggest that marijuana has made roads unsafe” (<https://www.civilized.life/articles/car-accidents-legal-marijuana/>). The report claims that there is “no significant association between recreational marijuana legalization in Washington and Colorado and subsequent changes in motor vehicle fatality rates in the first three years after recreational marijuana legalization.” Additionally, the Highway Loss Data Institute recently conducted a study that explored the effect of recreational cannabis legalization on road safety in Colorado, Washington, and Oregon.

While the study concluded there were 4%-16% increases in insurance claims relating to collisions, it has not been scientifically proven that these upticks are associated with people getting high on cannabis (<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/21/auto-crashes-are-on-the-rise-in-marijuana-states.html?view=story&%24DEVICE%24=native-android-mobile>). Essentially, the two events are coincidental, not causal. And so, it is unfair to suggest that cannabis alone causes more people to get into accidents on the road.

Those that generally share Chief Cordeiro’s current views on cannabis might suggest that the reason there is no linking factor between these increases in crash risk and recreational cannabis legalization is because there is no reliable field sobriety test for people with THC in their systems. One could also argue that many people who get into accidents are not only on cannabis, but alcohol and or other drugs that inhibit one’s ability to drive safely.

While I concede that we should establish field tests for cannabis users, I also note that to suggest that we should be working towards methods of detecting THC like we do alcohol (or other drugs for that matter) in the bloodstream at roadside is simply ludicrous. This is the equivalent to

suggesting the effects of THC on driving ability are even in the same stratosphere as the effects of alcohol on driving ability. Alcohol causes people to drive with much more risk and ignorance-and that is why science shows a correlation with blood alcohol levels and motor vehicle incidents.

The same can not be definitively said about cannabis (<https://www.livescience.com/51450-driving-on-marijuana-alcohol-dangerous.html>). It is clear that the effects of alcohol on driving ability should be much more concerning than those of cannabis-especially since anybody over the age of 21 can purchase alcohol at practically any corner in New Bedford.

Additionally, to suggest that the legalization of consuming recreational cannabis edibles would lead to more careless use by Massachusetts's drivers is ignorant. Do we prohibit people from unwrapping a McDonald's cheeseburger while they drive 65mph(+?) north on route 24 back to work? No. It is up to people to be educated enough to be aware of not only what they are putting in their body, but how much and what its effect will be on their anatomy and what they are engaging in. It is up to people to be educated on how their specific decisions impact the safety of those around them.

Cannabis is certainly more deserving of the legislation that alcohol has received for more than half a century, because the pure effects of THC alone on the average consumer's ability to drive has been scientifically proven to have no significant effect on crash and accident risk for the average consumer. Alternatively, the effects of alcohol on driving are undoubtedly detrimental to all-yet society makes it so there is at least some tolerance for those that can't help but being buzzed while they drive. I feel this 'double standard' is something we need to consider a great deal.

Questions 3 and 4:

-In what ways would legal recreational cannabis 'compound our

drug issue as a whole'?

-What is the science behind the relationship between cannabis and opiates?

Chief Cordeiro made one point in particular that I would like to wholeheartedly disagree with here. He claimed that in terms of recreational cannabis legalization in the city of New Bedford, "the timing is off by throwing more gasoline into the fire when we are already struggling with an addiction issue across the country." He went on to say, "...the recreational-I believe is going to compound our drug issues as a whole." Chief Cordeiro...you could not be more wrong about this.

Our drug issues are similar to those of our entire country. There is an ongoing national opiate epidemic; prescription and illegal. America comprises 5% of the world's population while consuming 80% of the world's opium. The American Academy of Pain Medicine notes that more than 100 million Americans suffer from chronic pain, while simultaneously, the number of opiate prescriptions has nearly doubled in the past decade (<http://drugabuse.com/legalizing-marijuana-decreases-fatal-opiate-overdoses/>).

Many people are either unknowingly becoming opium addicts over months and years of increasing prescribed use, or they are taking the fast track by using street heroin at alarming rates. Regardless, it is clear to us as Americans that we have an opioid addiction problem, not to mention how many Americans are avid alcohol consumers.

Marijuana contains chemicals such as Delta 9-THC, CBD, CBN, and THCV. These chemicals all offer pain relieving effects, while offering a potential solution for those who suffer from chronic pain. A study in the JAMA International Medicine Journal found that cannabis laws "are associated with significantly lower state-level opioid overdose mortality rates"

(<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarti>

cle/1898878).

While the study is specifically related to medical cannabis, the ultimate point is that the science behind cannabis as a plant supports the notion that regulation would positively influence our current drug issues. Therefore, cannabis would certainly not “compound our drug issue as a whole” as Chief Cordeiro suggests. And so I ask Chief Cordeiro; how exactly would legal recreational cannabis compound our drug issues as a whole?

It is evident that this country has a chronic pain issue. My argument is that cannabis offers much safer alternatives to dealing with these issues, to both those who are currently on opiates and those who are not. To quote a report from Integr8 Health founder and director Dr. Dustin Sulak,

“Can cannabis be used to replace opioids in chronic pain patients? It can certainly be used to enhance the effects of the opioids. A 2016 study surveyed 244 medical cannabis patients in Michigan, where medical cannabis use was associated with an overall 64 percent decrease in opioid use, a decrease in the number and side effects of other medications, and a 45 percent improvement in quality of life.

An Israeli study from the same year found that 44 percent of 176 opioid-using patients were able to discontinue opioid therapy entirely seven months after they began smoking cannabis or eating cannabis-infused cookies. (<https://www.projectcbd.org/about/plant-medicine-vs-big-pharma/americas-opiate-crisis-how-medical-cannabis-can-help>)”

In this report, Dr. Sulak goes on to state that abstaining from drugs simply does not work for everybody. Many people have legitimate health concerns that require taking something to mitigate the effects. The key is to focus on a term that Sulak refers to as “harm reduction”; replacing a harmful substance with a safer one. And so, the suggestion is that

cannabis users, over time, require the same or less of a dose of prescribed opiates to deal with their pain. In fact, many cannabis users are able to kick opiates altogether with little time, as the health benefits of consuming cannabis as prescribed are numerous.

As if this was not convincing enough, a 2009 study (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19444734>) found that cannabis users were staying in treatment programs for more than twice as long as non cannabis users. Additionally, this study found that intensive behavioral therapy helped those who also used cannabis, but didn't help non cannabis users. Cannabis has been shown to not only provide a more synergistic reduction of pain when taken with opiates, but to also treat symptoms of opiate withdrawal and prevent opiate tolerance building. These are hardly signs that cannabis legalization would make New Bedford's drug problem worse, as Chief Cordeiro suggests. In fact, these are signs that cannabis would help this country's drug problem.

Question 5:

How can the police of New Bedford work to make the city and its roads safe for all while allowing people with THC in their system to safely navigate the public ways?

I would like to acknowledge that recreational cannabis legalization and regulation in Massachusetts would absolutely require a great deal of work on the part of our law enforcement. We as citizens need our police to do the best possible job they can do to protect us and our civil liberties. And so perhaps you are wondering how our police would be able to do just that if something as unconventional as legal recreational cannabis were to hit the streets of New Bedford; a city with numerous social issues, such as violence, addiction, and corruption.

I believe that this task begins with properly educating the

masses on the facts behind the science of cannabis as a whole; not just medicinal or recreational. And from there, people should be given the liberty to decide what they put in their body and for what reason. The hope is that if most people are properly educated, then they should be trusted to make the appropriate decision for not only their own benefit, but for the benefit of those around them.

Cannabis is an astronomically safer alternative to opiates and alcohol, and at best is a more than adequate means to treat chronic pain for hundreds of millions of Americans. In some cases, cannabis could even get people off of opiates altogether. Therefore, making it easier to access by regulating recreational cannabis would help the majority, in my opinion.

If recreational cannabis were regulated in New Bedford so that anybody over the age of 21 were able to purchase cannabis in legal establishments (not on the streets) , there would need to be measures put into place to ensure the safety of all people. I believe the New Bedford Police would have to implement a more valid means to test roadside THC levels and its effect on specific drivers' abilities to operate a motor vehicle.

Perhaps police recordings of 'baseline results' pertaining to motor skills and mental capacity/communicative ability would be a solution; so that police officers would have a more reliable way to test a THC-positive person's ability operate a motor vehicle. It should go without saying that New Bedford Police should not be monitoring and responding to THC levels in bloodstreams the same way they do with alcohol or other drugs. The key is to find a way to monitor "how much cannabis is too much" for a specific person to be driving a car.

At the same time, this writer is in favor of punishments for people who are found to be "too high" at the time that they are found to have caused a motor vehicle accident. Punishments

should also be implemented to discourage people from selling cannabis illegally on the streets; the definition of cannabis regulation, essentially. This is how we would encourage people to be properly educated and to properly consume cannabis. Because the alternative would then be to possess ignorance towards what one would be doing to their own body and unsuspecting citizens, leading to pertinent consequences.

Additionally, if the citizens of New Bedford had public safe places to consume cannabis, then worries such as Chief Cordeiro's that non cannabis users would have to put up with the effects of cannabis without desire would be put to rest. Alcohol bars and tobacco (or hookah) bars exist, so why not cannabis clubs and/or parks?

Chief Cordeiro mentioned property owners as potentially being at risk of having tenants that would consume cannabis at the dismay of other tenants. I feel that this is an unreasonable concern-as landlords should have the responsibility of ensuring their tenants are aware of the dangers of "second-hand smoke". It should be up to landlords to either allow or disallow tenants to consume cannabis indoors. And if tenants are not able to consume indoors, then they should be able to consume outdoors in designated areas so that they do not impede on the basic rights of others to not be ingesting foreign chemicals against their will.

Ultimately, people are going to consume cannabis regardless. So why not do all that we can do ensure those people can do so safely while those that do not aren't subjected to deal with the decisions of their peers?

80% of New Bedford's eligible voters stayed home – is the apathy fixable?

The excitement of the New Bedford elections has passed. Yesterday, **I wrote about the higher registered voter turnout** – today I write about the embarrassingly low eligible voter turnout.

12,466 of the 54,726 registered New Bedford voters showed up to the polls on Tuesday which means 42,260 didn't. In a city with an official population of 95,072 (2010 census), 50% of the New Bedford took to time to register to vote, but only 25% of them actually found the energy to vote for New Bedford's future. Sadly, spending countless hours on social media complaining and campaigning for a candidate is valued more than actually voting.

Of the 95,072 residents, 71,250 are 18 years or older and eligible to vote. This means while we had a 25% voter turnout of registered voters, we only had a 19.7% turnout of eligible voters. This means one of five adults decided the future of the city. To put it another way, 80% of all those who had a voice, remained silent.

Apathy is one of New Bedford's biggest problems and defines New Bedford as much as fishing. Head to debates sponsored by local community organizations and you'll mostly find candidate campaign workers and supporters in the audience. Sadly, this apathy is true with most community events in New Bedford ranging from school events asking for parent involvement to city council meetings. To be honest, I give zero credit for registering to vote as it seems Massachusetts almost requires it when you register your car or do almost any official paperwork with the state. Showing up is all that really

matters in the end.

How do we “fix” New Bedford’s apathy problem? Is it even fixable? Does it even need fixing? For me, I don’t want everyone to vote, I’d prefer a low turnout of informed voters than a high turnout of uninformed ones. Figuring out who is informed and who is uninformed is an impossible metric, so we just have to go with inspiring the next generation of people to vote.

Inspiring voters needs to start early in our society and it starts at home with those not eligible to vote – our youth. Parents need to lead by example by showing up to their kid’s school events and activities. Parents can get our youth involved by taking them to community neighborhood meetings and by teaching them that voting is a voluntary civic responsibility that should be taken seriously. Parents should get their kids involved on election day – children under 18 can’t vote, but they sure can learn about and start to appreciate the value of elections. I feel this is the difference between the 19.7% that registered and voted on Tuesday and the 80% that didn’t bother – somewhere along the way the ones that voted learned the value of democracy.

Want to reduce voter apathy in New Bedford? Have a discussion with the youth now and get them involved with politics early. Or don’t and let the same 20% of eligible voters and their children decide the future of New Bedford for decades to come.

The Love We Seek by Andre

Morell

Love seeks but itself in another
But what is love?
Tis not so easily found
Or forged with ease
Truthfully, it is without sense or logic

It is the comfort of a word
The understanding in a nod
The warmth in a touch
Ears with which to listen
And shoulders leaned on to cry

It is forever patient
To come across it can be confusing
Even evoke anger
We examine it, look for strings
Try to gauge if there motives or angles
It's simplicity is what so irritates

It can only be understood, once we accept
It is here for us for it sees our need
A proper word can inspire
And an insult can linger forever
If spoken by the one we love fully

I love true and I love full
There is no love without risk
Tis not free from anxiety or anxiousness
A bundles of nerves moving rapidly
We doubt if we speak the right words
Do we dress the right way? How we sound
Are we enough for them? Will we satisfy?
Do we feel worthy of their love?

Love only smiles back at us
Yelling let go your insecurities

I accept thee as you already are
It sees us with clear vision as perfect
We only need see ourselves, how it see us

I do love
And do see thee as my love
I see not faults, I see experiences
I see beauty, I see intelligence
I see all this in you
In truth I have always seen it

So fear not, question not
I've no strings to attach, no conditions
For what I see in you is love
And assuredly there is no finer
You set my heart ablaze
My Queen

By Andre Morell