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Wednesday that the decades-old war on drugs has failed and that regulation is the answer.

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The sponsors of a bill to legalize marijuana possession in Rhode Island said Wednesday that the decades-old war on drugs has failed and that regulation is the answer.

“Strict regulation is the best way forward,” Rep. Edith Ajello, D-Providence, said at a State House news conference. Sen. Joshua Miller, D-Cranston, said that resources now spent on combating marijuana would be more wisely used “on treatment rather than incarceration.”

Miller said that purveyors of legal marijuana would have to adhere to legal requirements for purity, among other factors. “It will be sold by a person who is not selling something else that is killing hundreds by overdoses,” he said.

If passed, the law would regulate and tax marijuana in a fashion parallel to an approach taken with alcohol.

The bill would allow those 21 and older to possess up to an ounce and grow one plant. It would establish a system of marijuana retail stores and tax marijuana at the rate of \$50 an ounce for flowers and \$10 an ounce for leaves. The Department of Business Regulation would impose rules on security, labeling, health and safety.

The measure has “a good shot at passing,” said Jared Moffat of Regulate Rhode Island. As for adverse effects that critics have warned would occur if marijuana is legalized, Moffat noted that the state of Colorado has decriminalized marijuana. “The sky has not fallen in Colorado,” he said.

Rep. Cale P. Keable, D-Burrillville, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said

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Ajello said that young people have told her that it is easier for them to buy marijuana than alcohol. "The current policy isn't working," she said. "Prohibition isn't working. This legislation will do something to help with education and treatment, and it will have the bonus of tax income for the state."

Moffat said that Colorado's tax on marijuana had, in the first two months, brought in \$20 million. He said one estimate puts potential annual revenue for Rhode Island at between \$21 million and \$82 million. Half of the money would go to general revenue, he said, while the rest would be divided into treatment, education and related programs.

In addition, Moffat said, the new law would create "taxpaying, above-the-board jobs." In Colorado, he said, there has been "a spike" in tourism "not in any way associated with crime."

The bill was backed by such speakers as David Lewis, founder of the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies at Brown University; Andy Horwitz, director of the Criminal Defense Clinic at Roger William University School of Law; Beth Comery, a former Providence police officer and a member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition; Robert Capecchi, deputy director of state policies for the Marijuana Policy Project, and Rebecca McGoldrick, executive director of Protect Families First.

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