



March 26, 2019

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
Senator Andrea Stewart Cousins
Speaker Carl Heastie
Legislative Leaders and Members

Dear Governor Cuomo, Senator Stewart Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and members,

The NYS Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA) is honored to represent the families of our 2.6 million school children and our nearly 300,000 member parents, families, and educators. It is our mission to make every child's potential a reality and support EVERY child with ONE voice.

On November 26, 2018, we first sent you a letter stating our opposition to the legalization of marijuana for recreational use, and urged this issue be approached with serious forethought. We reiterated our opposition in a series of memos, joint letters, and press conferences in the past several months, alongside allies from the school, medical, public health and law enforcement communities. We urge you to listen to ALL of our concerns, and decouple this issue from state budget negotiations.

The legalization and commercialization of recreational marijuana creates a serious public and child health threat and sends a harmful mixed message to young people, that using recreational marijuana is acceptable. With a current opiate epidemic in our midst, with 1 in 5 children vaping or using electronic cigarettes, introducing recreational marijuana to the market is dangerous and counterintuitive. NYS PTA urges you to heed the recommendations from leading medical and public health organizations, school groups, and the law enforcement community.

While NYS PTA agrees there are issues of systemic injustice in NY, legalization of marijuana does not address the root of these issues, rather can exacerbate these problems by promoting increased drug use and the accompanying negative social consequences in disadvantaged communities. In Colorado and Washington, states that have legalized recreational use and sales, African Americans are twice as likely to be arrested for marijuana offenses. Colorado's marijuana arrest rate for African Americans was nearly double that of Caucasians in 2017 and arrests nearly tripled after the legalization of marijuana in Washington, D.C. We should focus on removing criminal penalties, expunge records, and offer justice instead of commercializing today's very potent marijuana and marijuana products.

Further, in Colorado and Washington State, marijuana-impaired driving fatalities have more than doubled. 1 in 5 drivers in Washington State are under the influence of marijuana, up from 1 in 10 prior to legalization. Are we ready and willing to accept these dangers in NY?

Worse yet, legalized recreational marijuana is having a serious negative effect on children. As example, the Children's Hospital of Colorado outlines the dangers of "Acute Marijuana Intoxication" and discusses the harm of child overdoses, usually as a result of ingestion of edible forms of marijuana (gummy bears, brownies, and lollipops).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention highlights that developing brains in children and teenagers are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana, and studies show that marijuana use by mothers during pregnancy may be linked to numerous health and behavioral problems in children.

In 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics reaffirmed its opposition to legalizing recreational marijuana:

"We know marijuana can be very harmful to adolescent health and development," said Seth D. Ammerman, MD, FAAP, a member of the AAP Committee on Substance Abuse and an author of the policy statement. "Making it more available to adults – even if restrictions are in place – will increase the access for teens. Just the campaigns to legalize marijuana can have the effect of persuading adolescents that marijuana is not dangerous, which can have a devastating impact on their lifelong health and development."

NYS PTA stands ready to work collaboratively to support ALL children and families. We are available at any time by contacting our Executive Director, Kyle Belokopitsky, at execdirector@nyspta.org or 518-452-8808 (office) or 518-817-3017 (cell).

This issue MUST be decoupled from the State Budget. Please stand with our children.

Sincerely,



Lorey Zaman, President



Kyle Belokopitsky, Esq., Executive Director