



May 29, 2019

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12244

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Senator Majority Leader
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable John Flanagan
Senator Minority Leader
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

The Honorable Brian Kolb
Assembly Minority Leader
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo and Legislative Leaders,

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.

We continue to strongly oppose the legalization of marijuana for recreational use, and oppose legislation that was recently amended in the Senate and Assembly.

We have previously written our opposition in November 2018, and consistently through the 2019 state budget negotiations in a series of memos, joint letters, and press conferences alongside allies from the school, medical, public health and law enforcement communities.

The legalization and commercialization of recreational marijuana creates a serious public and child health threat. NYS PTA urges you to heed the recommendations from leading medical and public health organizations, school groups, and the law enforcement community and NOT legalize recreational marijuana.

We offer the following examples why this important policy decision cannot be rushed, and we continue our opposition:

- In Colorado, toxicology reports are showing an increased amount of adolescent suicides are testing positive for marijuana. Marijuana has been linked to a number of different mental health issues including schizophrenia to depression and anxiety.
- Also, from 2005 and 2015, the number of youth (ages 13-20) who went to urgent care for marijuana related illnesses rose from 1.8% per 1,000 youth to 4.9% per 1,000 youth. More than 4,000 youth between 2005 and 2015 visited hospitals because of marijuana related issues.
- The legalization of marijuana will only create more issues for our law enforcement, as NY's marijuana sniffing dogs may have to be retired, forcing police departments to buy and train new drug sniffing dogs.

As example, in California, it cost approximately \$11,000 to buy a new dog and another \$11,000 for training the dog.

- Minors are attempting to use fake identification at dispensaries; since January 2017, more than 110 fake ID's have been confiscated at legal dispensaries.
- Further, in states where marijuana has been legalized, we are seeing high counts of potentially harmful fungi and bacteria, which indicate the growing, marketing, and storing facilities are poorly regulated. In legalized states, there are not enough labs to test the millions of pounds of legal marijuana, leading to harmful marijuana being sold to the public.
- 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).
- New methods of ingesting marijuana such as Vaporizable Cannabis Concentrates (VCC) are far more potent than cannabis plants. On average, regular cannabis plants contain 10-12% THC while vaporized cannabis can contain 60-85% THC. While a small amount of THC can be used to treat anxiety, nausea in cancer patients and increase blood flow, a high amount of THC can cause paranoia, psychosis, non-stop vomiting, and can produce massive vasoconstriction.
- 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.
- There are studies which show if a child started using marijuana before the age of 18 the child lost on average 8 IQ points, where as those who started as an adult did not experience a drop in IQ points. Children who use marijuana regularly are more likely to have problems learning, remembering, and have scored lower in math and reading.
- 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."

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. As reminder, 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;
- Arrests nearly tripled after the legalization of marijuana in Washington, D.C.;
- Marijuana-impaired driving fatalities have more than doubled in both states, 1 in 5 drivers in Washington State are under the influence of marijuana, up from 1 in 10 prior to legalization.

NYS PTA urges you to charge NYS public health services and agencies, including the NYS Office of Health, NYS Office of Mental Health working in collaboration with the Mental Health Association in New York State and the NYS Medical Society, to conduct unbiased multiple medical-based data-driven studies on recreational marijuana and its impact on the physical and mental health of our citizens and children.

We also support multiple legislative and public hearings on the legalization of recreational marijuana in the 2019-2020 legislative session before any legislation is reconsidered.

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).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorey A Zaman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

LoreyA. Zaman, President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Kyle Belokopitsky, Esq., Executive Director

CC: Members of the NYS Senate and Assembly