

Our respective organizations oppose proposals to legalize the recreational use of marijuana, and urge this issue be removed from state budget negotiations.

The legalization and commercialization of recreational marijuana creates a serious public and child health threat and sends a mixed message to young people that using recreational marijuana is acceptable.

Further, legalization of recreational marijuana would further strain the public health workforce and professionals who are responding day and night to the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to take a cautious approach to protecting public health infrastructure in New York State.

With the serious crisis of youth vaping, and the continuing opioid epidemic, this harmful legislation is counterintuitive. We urge you to heed the recommendations from leading medical and public health organizations, education groups, and the law enforcement community, and NOT legalize recreational marijuana.

In 2017, the American Medical Association approved a policy position that concluded cannabis is a dangerous drug and a serious public health concern, and that the sale of cannabis for recreational use should not be legalized. Its position was based upon the analysis of multiple studies that found, even as cannabis had some therapeutic benefits, there was substantial evidence of a statistical linkage between cannabis smoking and health issues. The AMA-issued paper looked at data from jurisdictions that legalized cannabis that demonstrated adverse impacts, such as unintentional pediatric exposures resulting in increased calls to poison control centers and emergency department visits. That data showed that there was an increase in traffic deaths due to cannabis-related impaired driving.

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 ... 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.”

Why must we continue to oppose this measure?

- Adolescent brains continue to mature and develop until around age 25, especially in areas of the brain involved in planning, decision-making and learning which develop last. Studies show if a child starts using marijuana before 18, the child will lose on average 8 IQ points.
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Studies have shown that when marijuana is consumed, THC and other compounds enter the bloodstream, reach the brain and attach to naturally occurring receptors called cannabinoid receptors. This causes problems in learning and memory, coordination, reaction time and judgment. It also can cause hallucinations, paranoia and a range of emotional problems. Marijuana use may

cause academic difficulties, poor sports performance, impaired driving and troubled relationships.”

- According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual V, studies have shown that marijuana can cause symptoms of serious mental health related issues such as schizophrenia, anxiety, depression and sleep disorder. Alarmingly, people using cannabis who are in the mental health system are much less likely to participate in services and supports.
- The SAMHSA report, “National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Comparison of 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Population Percentages” showed that marijuana use by youth has increased in those states that have legalized marijuana.
- From 2005 to 2015, the number of youth (ages 13-20) who went to urgent care for marijuana related illnesses increased 172%.
- In Colorado after legalization, marijuana impaired driving deaths went up 150%.
- In Colorado, toxicology reports of adolescent suicide victims show increased marijuana usage, and marijuana has been linked to schizophrenia, depression and anxiety.
- 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).

Therefore: (1) we strongly oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana, and (2) recommend that proposals to legalize recreational marijuana use be removed from the State Budget.

Mental Health Association in NYS
New York State Parent Teacher Association
Association of School Business Officials of New York
Rural Schools Association of New York State
NYS Association of Chiefs of Police
New York State Sheriffs’ Association
New York State Association of County Health Officials
Smart Approaches to Marijuana