

**March 11, 2021**

**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.

We are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 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.**

Why must we continue to oppose this measure?

- A new report in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs found that children in California are significantly more likely to use marijuana since its legalization there in 2016.
- Data from over three million 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students who participated in the California Healthy Kids Survey from 2010-2011 through 2018-2019 school years revealed a “significant increase” in marijuana usage. This data revealed an 18% increase in the likelihood of lifetime marijuana use and a 23% increase in past 30-day usage since California legalized marijuana.
- The researchers concluded that legalization likely presented increased opportunities for adolescents to obtain marijuana, and specifically pointed to increased availability of non-smoking marijuana products such as edibles.
- Further, Nevada and Oregon saw similar trends: once legalized, youth marijuana usage significantly increased when analyzing data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.
- The University of Michigan’s *Monitoring the Future Survey of American Youth* reported that between 2017 and 2018 the percentage of 8th and 10th graders who report “vaping” marijuana increased 63%.
- And according to a 2019 report by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s toxicology reports, the percentage of adolescent suicide victims testing positive for marijuana continues to increase. Between 2011 and 2013, 20.7% of suicide victims between the ages of 10 and 19 tested positive for marijuana (compared with 12.7% who tested positive for alcohol). Between 2014-2016, 22.4% tested positive for marijuana (compared with 9.3% for alcohol).
- In Colorado, the annual rate of marijuana-related emergency department visits increased by 62% from 2012 to 2017 and marijuana-related poisoning hospitalization rates in Colorado rose by 143% from 2012 to 2017 (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2019).
- In 2017, the American Medical Association 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.
- In 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics offered, “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.”
- The American Lung Association is clear, “Smoking marijuana clearly damages the human lung, and regular use leads to chronic bronchitis and can cause an immune-compromised person to be more susceptible to lung infections.”
- In November 2020, UCLA researchers found “smoking ... causes more severe infection by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the airways of the lungs.”

- 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%.
- According to the CDC, 80% of lung illness and deaths are THC-related, and 1 in 10 marijuana users will become addicted. For people who begin using younger than 18, that number rises to 1 in 6.
- In Colorado, toxicology reports of adolescent suicide victims show increased marijuana usage, and marijuana has been linked to schizophrenia, depression and anxiety.
- A recent systematic review and meta-analysis in JAMA Psychiatry (2019) of 11 studies including more than 23,000 individuals, found that adolescent cannabis consumption was associated with increased risk of developing depression and suicidal behavior later in life, even in the absence of a premorbid condition.
- 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).
- An increase in marijuana use would be highly taxing upon all law enforcement agencies, especially with regards to detecting Driving While Ability Impaired by drugs (DWAI), where the intoxicating agent is marijuana.
- Unlike a case of Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) involving alcohol, there is no drug testing procedure or device equivalent to a breath chemical alcohol test.
- Further, in difficult financial times, K-9 units which are trained for drug detection will all have to be replaced, as they are all trained to detect marijuana.

**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.**

Medical Society of the State of NY  
 New York State Parent Teacher Association  
 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