



Center FOR Christian Virtue

Public Policy. Engagement. Education.

To: Chair Shane Wilkin
Vice Chair Andrea White
Ranking Member Richard Brown
House Government Oversight Committee

From: David Mahan
Policy Director
Center for Christian Virtue

Re: SB 261

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee,

My name is David Mahan and I am here on behalf of Center for Christian Virtue, Ohio's Largest Christian public policy organization. I am pleased to be here today to testify on SB 261, which proposes to reduce marijuana regulations, expand the number of marijuana dispensaries, make it possible for just about anybody to obtain a "medical marijuana card", and increase the maximum THC limit to the unnecessarily high level of 90%.

In the February 2nd edition of Cleveland.com's Capitol Letter, it was reported that, **"The campaign to legalize recreational marijuana raised \$1.3 million last year. Half of it came from the Marijuana Policy Project, the national advocacy organization behind the push for the legislature to legalize medical marijuana. Laura Hancock reports that the other contributors were mainly medical marijuana businesses in Northeast Ohio."** So, assuming that most everyone in this room realizes that this "Medical Expansion" bill is nothing more than the **Gateway Policy for Recreational Marijuana**, I will simply focus my time today on the key lessons Ohio should learn from states that have regrettably traveled down this path. With disastrous outcomes such as increased traffic fatalities, out-of-control black markets, hiring shortages due to failed drug tests, the exacerbation of the Opioid epidemic, and the predatory targeting of children by a well funded, **addiction-for-profit marijuana industry that produces heavy users by hooking early users**, it



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makes perfect sense that reputable organizations like the **American Medical Association (AMA), the American Society of Addiction Medicine, AAA, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the National Fraternal Order of Police all oppose the commercialization of such a dangerous narcotic.**

An analysis by **Attorney General Yost’s Scientific Committee on Opioid Prevention and Education found the death rate in Ohio from opioid overdose in the second quarter of 2020 to be “the highest rate in 10 years.”** And yet legislators find themselves considering multiple marijuana legalization bills here at the Ohio Statehouse - two advocating for recreational marijuana use, and this one advocating for the expansion of current medical marijuana legislation clearly intended to help pave the way for the other two. In the 2016 version of this bill the maximum level of THC was capped at 70%, which is already extremely high for medical use. Was 70% decided upon in 2015 due to health and safety concerns, or was the legislature just not ready to push the 90% THC envelope, prescribed in this new version? Who does a bill like this benefit the most - Ohioans who are already struggling with epidemic rates of addiction, historically high crime, and a mental health crisis, or the marijuana industry, whose ultimate goal is not medical, but recreational marijuana, as we’ve clearly seen in several other states?

According to a recent study entitled, **“Mapping cannabis potency in medical and recreational programs in the United States,”**¹ more than 90 percent of the legal marijuana products offered in medical dispensaries in the U.S. are **much stronger than what clinical studies have shown doctors recommend for chronic pain relief.** The study’s lead author, an associate professor of anaesthesiology at Wake Forest School of Medicine said, **“We know that high-potency products should not have a place in the medical realm because of the high risk of developing cannabis-use disorders, which are related to exposure to high tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content products.”** He goes on to say that, “Several earlier studies showed that levels of **up to 5 percent THC** – the main psychoactive compound in marijuana that provides pain relief as well as intoxication – **were sufficient to reduce chronic pain with minimal side effects.”- UP TO 5%...** The

¹ Cash MC, Cunnane K, Fan C, Romero-Sandoval EA (2020) Mapping cannabis potency in medical and recreational programs in the United States. PLoS ONE 15(3): e0230167. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230167>



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research team found that most of the products offered in the medical dispensaries in the study had more than 10 percent THC and that many had **15 percent or more, the same as is available in products at recreational dispensaries.**

The marijuana industry, who is driving this “medical marijuana” bill, is actively marketing marijuana as a solution to the opioid epidemic, claiming that marijuana is a safe and effective substitute for opioids for the management of pain. However, the following studies have shown that **marijuana is a significant risk factor in the increased non-medical use of opioids:**

“The opioid crisis appears to be worsening where marijuana has been legalized.” - **JAMA INTERNATIONAL MEDICINE JOURNAL, 2018²**

Over 30,000 American adults were sampled and researchers found that marijuana users were more than twice as likely to move on to abuse prescription opioids. - **THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY, 2017³**

“[P]rescription opioids were seen as a wonder drug, especially for pain management.” “We should not repeat history with yet another wonder drug installed before proper evidence.” - **Addiction, 2018⁴**

Opioid overdose fatalities have increased in Colorado since legalization⁵ - **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2018**

While we cannot foretell the future of what the true outcomes of this bill will be, we can and should look at the recent history of what the marijuana industry has done in states like Colorado and California. First they ride in on the white horse of

² Bleyer, A., & Barnes, B. (2018). Opioid Death Rate Acceleration in Jurisdictions Legalizing Marijuana Use. *JAMA internal medicine*, 178(9), 1280-1281.

³ Olfson, M., Wall, M. M., Liu, S. M., & Blanco, C. (2017). Cannabis use and risk of prescription opioid use disorder in the United States. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 175(1), 47-53.

⁴ Rehm, J. (2018). Commentary on Liang et al.(2018): The potential impact of medical cannabis on public health with respect to reducing prescription opioid use and associated harm. *Addiction*.

⁵ Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. (n.d.). Vital Statistics Program. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/vital-statistics-program>



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“medical marijuana” to deliver us all from chronic pain. Then comes recreational marijuana riding in on promised tax benefits that will turn around all of our state budget deficits and the failing public schools that the lottery and casino tax revenues failed to rescue. Wellington Webb, Former 12 year, Democrat Mayor of Colorado, and Former supporter of Marijuana Commercialization stated that, “The Money promised for education is going to marijuana regulation and the Pot Industry”. He went on to say that what it actually produced was “a 32% increase in Pot related traffic deaths and more pot dispensaries than Starbucks and McDonalds combined”- and I’m sure it would not surprise you to know that most of those “Green Man”, Medical Marijuana shops are located in disadvantaged communities. In the first hearing Representative Galonski was wise in voicing her concerns about the Black Market activity that has plagued every legalized state in the nation. In California and Oregon the legislature is calling upon the National Guard to try and shut down all of the Illegal Grows that were supposed to miraculously disappear on their own with legalization. In New York, Colorado and California they are cutting much, if not all of the promised tax revenues to help the White Collar Dope Dealers compete with the Black Market Dope Dealers.

To ignore a decade of the lived experiences of Mayors, Attorney Generals, Business owners, Doctors and Treatment Professionals from legalized states would be utter insanity, and Ohio families deserve more than being used as pawns in a game rigged only to benefit the marijuana industry and its Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol investors. And as always, CCV will work tirelessly to reveal the true intent of this “Medical Expansion” bill and its sponsors to the people who will ultimately have to bear the weight of its consequences.

For an extensive look into the actual Headlines that are animating the press in states that have already legalized Marijuana, please find the attached document, “Marijuana is Bad News for Ohio”. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of this proposed legislation. If the committee has any questions for me, I will do my best to answer them.

The Center for Christian Virtue (CCV) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that endeavors to create an Ohio where God’s blessings of life, family, and religious freedom are treasured, respected, and protected. www.ccv.org -- (513) 733-5775