

Opponent Written Testimony- December 11, 2023
HB 354
Denise Mayer, Director Step Up Anderson Township

Chairman Jay Edwards, Vice-Chair Jeff LaRe, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony for House Bill 354 which aims to define and establish parameters to Issue 2.

My name is Denise Mayer, and I am the Director of Step-Up Anderson Township, a prevention coalition in Cincinnati. We have been dedicated to a safe, healthy and drug free community for over five years. It has been our experience that the community is uneducated on the dangers of vaping particularly with Tetrahydrocannabinoid (THC), so perception of harm continues to be low. As Colorado and other early legalization states have seen there is a serious Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD) that comes with the availability of marijuana.

Homegrown flower plants can be easily grown anywhere, and the potency of the flower modified by botanist to be up to 40% THC. The early days of use in the 70's was about 3-5% with some lost to combustion. This flower is then further extracted to produce oils, dabs, edibles, and a variety of other products that are up to 100%. These can be added to joints, foods, and drinks. Allowing unlimited or uncontrolled growers will defy any legal enforcement by the police. Preventing homegrown marijuana plants will help assure that accidental poisoning of children by consuming what they think are candies will be more limited.

There are many studies all over the world that support the association between cannabis use and mental illness. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has also determined this correlation in young users. The underdeveloped brain is severely impacted leading to brain damage which is not recoverable. The reduction in potency from 90-50, although a positive step, still contributes significantly to teens experiencing CUD and mental illness. Paranoia, schizophrenia, and suicide have been identified with this early use. The negative affects continue into these young people's lives and adult decisions are impacted. The American Psychiatric Association states, "There is no current scientific evidence that cannabis is in any way beneficial for the treatment of any psychiatric disorder. In contrast, current evidence supports, at minimum, a strong association of cannabis use with the onset of psychiatric disorders. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to harm, given the effects of cannabis on neurological development." "Cannabis use was associated with increased suicide, suicide plan, and suicide attempt regardless of whether someone was also experiencing depression." NIDA June 2021.

Although appropriating funding for treatment is extremely important, the House members need to understand how limited treatment is. Ohio is not equipped with enough treatment facilities that are affordable to deal with the amount of Cannabis Use Disorder that will come with this legalization. There are few effective treatments for these teens at present time.

Prevention is always the key and funds should be allocated to age appropriate and evidence-based prevention education for K-12 schools as well as to Ohio colleges and universities. Funding should also be allocated for prevention coalitions across the state who work tirelessly to educate both parents and young people with programming that gives positive skills that deter substance use disorders.

Step Up supports home rule authority that allows for townships, cities, and villages to regulate zoning and prohibiting marijuana operators in their community. We have seen a plethora of vape shops in our township resulting in sales to our middle school and high schoolers despite the Tobacco 21 law. There is very little the police can do. Marijuana dispensaries will provide a whole new set of problems for our Township.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 86. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information. I can be reached at stepupandersontownship@gmail.com or 513-231-2262