

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 326

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member DeMora, and Members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 326.

My name is Jodi Salvo, and I am an Ohio Certified Prevention Consultant and the coordinator of the Empower Tuscarawas community coalition, which works to prevent youth substance use and promote mental health wellness in our community. I strongly support the bill's goal of prohibiting the sale of intoxicating hemp products in Ohio.

Risk, Harm, and the Need for Rescheduling

The increasing availability of unregulated hemp products, many of which contain synthetic cannabinoids or derivatives like Delta-8-THC, Delta-10-THC, and THCA, poses a significant risk to public health. These products, marketed as "legal" alternatives to marijuana, are fully accessible to youth in our state and communities and are often misperceived as harmless or safe. However, their psychoactive effects—often indistinguishable from traditional marijuana—can be just as dangerous, especially for young people. These products are sold without oversight or regulation, which exacerbates the risk to public health and safety.

As a prevention professional, I have seen firsthand how youth are often led to believe that these substances are safe because they are marketed as "hemp-derived" or "legal" under Ohio's hemp laws. However, the reality is that these products are unregulated and pose a serious risk due to their unknown potency and potential for harm. The lack of regulation, coupled with their widespread accessibility, makes it increasingly difficult to protect our community from the dangers these substances present.

Recommendation for a Comprehensive Definition of Psychoactive Hemp

To strengthen the effectiveness of SB 326 and eliminate potential loopholes, I recommend the inclusion of a comprehensive definition of "psychoactive hemp" in the bill. Currently, the bill defines "intoxicating hemp products" based on THC content—specifically Delta-9 THC and non-Delta-9 THC compounds. While this is an important step, it is critical to also include tetrahydrocannabinolic acid (THCA) and other precursor compounds in the definition. THCA, a non-intoxicating precursor to THC, that can be converted into psychoactive THC through heat or chemical processes. THCA is pervasive in our vape shops throughout the State of Ohio. Without including THCA in the bill's language, we will still have these psychoactive products in our communities.

Proposed Definition of Psychoactive Hemp

To ensure the bill's comprehensive coverage and reduce any potential loopholes, I recommend consideration of "Psychoactive Hemp" definition to include:

- **THCA and Other Precursor Compounds:** Any product containing tetrahydrocannabinolic acid (THCA) or similar non-psychoactive precursors that can be converted into psychoactive THC through heat or chemical processes. THCA, when heated, converts into THC, which has psychoactive effects. By including THCA in the definition, we can prevent

products from being marketed as "non-psychoactive" when they have the potential to cause impairment once processed.

- Synthetic or Altered Cannabinoids: Any product containing synthetic or chemically modified cannabinoids intended to mimic THC's psychoactive effects.
- Recreational Hemp Products: Any hemp-derived edibles, tinctures, inhalants, or smokable products marketed for recreational use or capable of producing psychoactive effects.

Rationale for Schedule 1 Classification

While SB 326 does not specifically call for a Schedule 1 classification of these products, I fully support the intent of the bill to remove harmful intoxicating hemp products from the market. Moving these products to a Schedule 1 classification would help to create a clear and enforceable framework for restricting their sale. This would assist law enforcement with the ability to take action through raids, compliance checks, and enforcement measures that are currently not possible due to the ambiguity of hemp regulations. A Schedule 1 classification would signal that these products, due to their high potential for abuse and lack of accepted medical use, should be fully restricted.

Our Tuscarawas County Sheriff has recognized the growing problem of psychoactive hemp products in our community and is deeply concerned about the access that youth have to these substances. He has expressed support for SB 326 and would welcome the opportunity to run raids and conduct compliance checks to ensure these products do not continue to pose a threat to the health and safety of our community. Having the ability to enforce these laws would be a critical step in protecting Ohioans, especially our youth, from the dangers of unregulated psychoactive hemp products.

Protecting Ohio Hemp Farmers

While I fully support the goal of SB 326 to remove harmful intoxicating hemp products from the market, it is equally important that we do not inadvertently harm Ohio's hemp farmers in the process. Ohio's hemp industry has been facing significant challenges, and many of our farmers do not have access to the legal marijuana market, leaving them with limited opportunities to sell their hemp-derived products. At the same time, there is a growing demand for non-psychoactive hemp products that are high in CBD and low in THC, especially from our older adult population. These products are essential for individuals, particularly older adults, who are seeking natural remedies for conditions such as anxiety, sleep disorders, and pain management and not wanting to get "high" from high THC products that flood Ohio dispensaries.

It is essential that any regulations governing intoxicating hemp products do not unnecessarily restrict the production and sale of non-psychoactive hemp products. As we move forward with this bill, I encourage the committee to ensure that Ohio hemp farmers have access to a viable market for their non-psychoactive products, which serve the public health needs of Ohioans. These products, which are critical for individuals seeking natural, non-psychoactive relief, should not be unduly restricted as part of efforts to eliminate harmful psychoactive products from the market.

Conclusion

In closing, I commend this committee for its dedicated work to remove unregulated, psychoactive hemp products from our communities and reduce access to these substances from among our youth. Senate Bill 326 is a critical step in protecting our youth. By incorporating a more comprehensive definition of "psychoactive hemp" that includes THCA and other precursor compounds, we can enhance the bill's ability to address the risks these products pose. Furthermore, moving these products to a Schedule 1 classification would significantly improve law enforcement's ability to regulate and enforce these laws, ensuring that these harmful substances do not continue to threaten our communities.

However, it is equally important to ensure that Ohio's hemp farmers are not negatively impacted by these regulations and that low-THC, high-CBD products are accessible as a safer alternative than products that induce a high

I urge the committee to take these considerations into account as you move forward with this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or would like any additional information, I can be reached at jodi.salvo@gmail.com.