

March 11th, 2025

Chairman Brian Stewart
House Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
Ohio Poison Centers: Testimony – HB 96

Chairman Stewart and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony on the impact of recreational marijuana on Ohio's citizens and the impact on our poison control operations. My name is Dr. Hannah Hays, the Medical Director and Chief of Toxicology at the Central Ohio Poison Center located at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus. This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Ohio Poison Control Centers (PCC), including the Drug and Poison Information Center located at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Together, we ensure that all Ohioans maintain access to trusted poison control services at no cost 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

HB 96, As Introduced, includes the Poison Control Centers as a recipient of the adult use marijuana excise tax. Ohio is the only state in the country that does not currently fund its Poison Control Centers. We applaud Governor DeWine for recognizing the vital services we provide and ask the allocation to be retained in the House.

Ohio Poison Control Centers (PCCs) provide immediate, expert medical advice and drug information to individuals and families of all ages. Last year, we responded to more than 80,000 poisoning victims and 25,000 inquiries, representing a poisoning or drug overdose every 6 minutes. Additionally, one in five of these calls were received from emergency departments, first responders, and law enforcement professionals responding to an overdose patient or poisoning victim.

Poison Control services are provided by highly trained physicians, pharmacists, and nurses with specialized expertise and certification in medical toxicology and related disciplines including addiction medicine. It is well established that consultation with a poison center improves patient outcomes and eliminates unnecessary healthcare costs by reducing unnecessary ED visits, ambulance runs, and hospital length of stay. It is estimated that we **save Ohioans nearly \$60 million dollars each year**, second only to vaccines in savings per dollar invested.

Every call to the poison center is documented and uploaded to the National Poison Data System (NPDS) in real time. Our data is used to identify and respond to emerging public health threats across the state, as well as to advance medical research. We can also adapt these data systems to support proactive risk evaluation and prevention strategies. For example, our data is used to monitor novel opioids, e-cigarettes, edible marijuana products, toxic mushroom exposures, and increased adolescent overdose and self-harm trends. Ohio Poison Centers play a key role in emergency preparedness and response, as demonstrated by the clinical guidance and situational awareness we provided during the East Palestine Train Derailment incident.

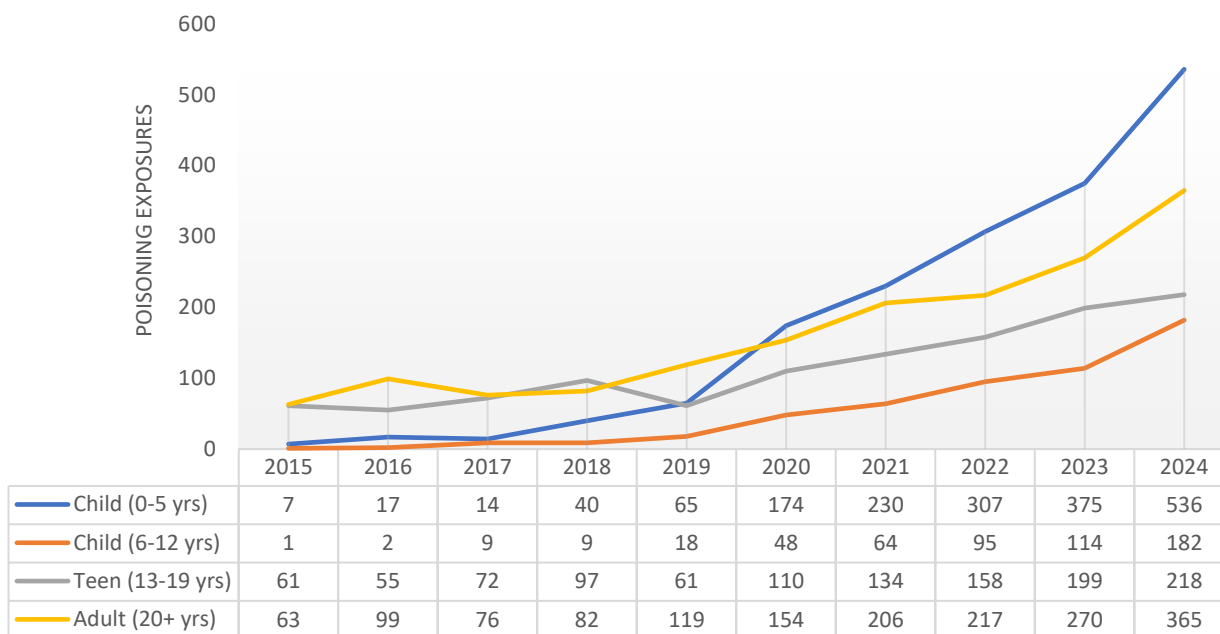
In addition to the poison control hotline, we act as the hub for medical toxicology training for first responders and healthcare professionals. We also maintain a team of educators and prevention specialists who are focused on reducing the impact of poisoning and drug overdose within Ohio

communities. Our services are accredited by the American Association of Poison Control Centers and certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The number of **accidental poisonings** reported to Ohio Poison Centers for all age groups has **increased 20-fold** from baseline levels prior to the introduction of retail medical marijuana in early 2019. This trend has been most notable for **young children** aged less than 6 years (**36-fold increase**). When young children access these products, they can experience more severe symptoms including hallucinations, confusion, loss of consciousness, and respiratory failure. In 2024, nearly 500 young children (aged <6 years) received care in an emergency department setting after ingesting an intoxicating THC-based product. Of these, 65% were assessed to require hospital admission and one in four of these admissions involved an ICU setting.

Because symptoms do not begin immediately after a cannabis edible ingestion, children have time to consume very large doses before they recognize that something is wrong. When this happens, we often receive a call from EMS, requesting assistance in caring for a critically ill child while on scene and in transport. This is an almost-every-day event.

Ohio Poison Control: Marijuana Exposure Trends by Age Group



It may not surprise you that poison centers receive calls from law enforcement while caring for a person, a child or an adult, with severe symptoms after an exposure to cannabis edibles. In my practice, I also receive phone calls almost weekly from child protective services and police officers who need my help understanding what happened, how to interpret laboratory testing, and how to support families with education and other prevention resources.

These accidental poisonings are negatively affecting children, families, and healthcare systems throughout the state of Ohio and they will undoubtedly continue to increase. With the passage of

recreational marijuana, Ohio PCCs have observed a projected increase in volume of calls, consultations with healthcare providers, and the need for additional public education programs to combat these exposures.

Research from other states with recreational marijuana demonstrates an increase in accidental ingestions by children and adults and we anticipate a similar trend in Ohio. Multiple states have reported unintentional poisoning incidents involving children more than doubled after legalization.¹²³

- An article published in the Journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians (Aug 2022) noted that poison center exposure rates in decriminalized states increased by **30% per year – every year- over** a six-year period, compared to no change in non-legal states.⁴
- A study conducted by Nationwide Children’s Hospital clearly indicates a correlation between the legalization of marijuana and accidental ingestion. The study found that over an eight-year period, the mean annual rate of marijuana ingestions in children rose by **27% per year** - with more than 70% of all cases occurring in states with legalized marijuana.⁵

To prevent accidental poisoning and reduce the impact on Ohioans, we support prevention measures that improve the safety of these products, which include, but are not limited to:

- Prominent placement of the Poison Help line (1-800-222-1222) within dispensaries and on product packaging
- Child-resistant / tamper-resistant packaging of products
- Clear labeling of cannabis (marijuana) content on packaging
- Individual wrapping of each dosing unit
- Limitations of total cannabis (marijuana) content per package
- Restriction of the use of brightly colored products and logos that may be appealing to children

As stated previously, Ohio’s Poison Centers save \$60 million dollars in unnecessary healthcare spending each year, yet Ohio is the **only** remaining state that does not currently provide financial support for this free public service. The vast majority of subsidized funding falls on Ohio’s pediatric medical centers.

On behalf of Ohio PCCs, we recommend that the General Assembly dedicate 4% of the tax revenue from recreational marijuana excise tax to support our services as proposed in HB96. We recommend creating a budget line item for the purpose of creating visibility into the use of these funds and the importance of these services in protecting the public and tracking injuries and exposures resulting from the new recreational marijuana industry. This stable, permanent funding will allow Ohio PCCs to provide:

- Prevention Services – PCC expertise will be integrated to develop effective risk mitigation strategies with increased availability of marijuana in households.
- Public Education – expand educational initiatives to improve public awareness of the risks tied to highly concentrated marijuana formulations.

¹ Thomas, A.A., Von Derau, K., Bradford, M.C., Moser, E., Garrard, A. & Mazor, S. (2019). Unintentional pediatric marijuana exposures prior to and after legalization and commercial availability of recreational marijuana in Washington State. *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 56(4), 398-404

² Wang, G.S., Hoyte, C., Roosevelt, G. & Heard, K. (2019). The continued impact of marijuana legalization on unintentional pediatric exposures in Colorado. *Clinical Pediatrics* 58(1), 114-116.

³ Wang, S.G., Roosevelt, G., & Heard, K. (2013). Pediatric marijuana exposures in a medical marijuana state. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 167(7), 630-633.

⁴ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9255894/

⁵ www.nationwidechildrens.org/newsroom/news-releases/2019/06/marijuana-ingestions-study

- Consultation to Providers – continue to support front line health workers and first responders to develop best practice guidelines to prevent future exposures.
- Data Collection – real time data can be used to better inform and evaluate regulatory and public health measures to enhance safety surveillance, sentinel event detection, research, and risk mitigation strategies.

With the passage of recreational marijuana, Ohio's children are at increased risk for unintentional exposure and harm tied to expanded availability. Ohio PCCs are ready to assist Ohio children, families, and communities in responding to accidental exposures, supporting prevention programs to educate the public, and collecting data to improve public health policies.

We are grateful for the House's continued and thoughtful work on this issue, especially with the recent introduction of HB 160, which works to address child resistant packaging and limitations on advertising to children. We support these efforts to protect children from these harmful products.

While we can anticipate some ways this new industry will impact the state of Ohio, we have yet to understand its full impact. Ohio's Poison Control Centers will clearly play a vital role in effectively tackling these challenges. We are a unique combination of clinical care, cost effectiveness, public health surveillance, and interaction with those on front lines from first responders to law enforcement, and everyone in between. We are a proven, highly efficient network most deserving of full support and funding.

Chair Stewart and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to submit this testimony on the critical role Ohio Poison Centers play in keeping our children and families safe and we look forward to working with you on these efforts. Please retain the funding allocation to the Poison Control Centers in HB 96.

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