

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member & Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is **Kevin**, and I am the owner of **RYYN Botanicals**, a company dedicated to bringing all-natural, organic hemp-derived THC beverages to consumers. Our flagship product, **HYDRO**, is currently in production and set to launch in July—but if S.B. 56 passes in its current form, my business, along with countless others, will not survive.

Ohio has long prided itself on supporting small businesses and fostering entrepreneurship, offering people the opportunity to pursue the American Dream. That belief is what has driven my support for the Conservative Party, a party built on common sense policies that help businesses grow and prosper. Yet, S.B. 56 contradicts these values, imposing unnecessary restrictions that threaten innovation, competition, and economic opportunity for Ohio entrepreneurs.

A History of Cautious Cannabis Regulation

Ohio has wrestled with cannabis regulation for years, and history shows that voters approach legalization with care. In 2015, Ohioans overwhelmingly rejected the state's first attempt at legalization—not due to opposition to cannabis itself, but out of concerns over monopolization and unfair market control. This decision reaffirmed a key Ohio principle: a free and competitive market where businesses, especially small and independent ones, have the opportunity to succeed.

Now, we stand at yet another regulatory crossroads—one that threatens to cripple Ohio's ability to compete in a growing industry and devastate small businesses statewide.

The Devastating Impact on Small Businesses & Retailers

Restrictive policies—such as limiting hemp-derived THC products to under 10mg per serving—would not just affect manufacturers, but also over 850 retailers across Ohio. These include smoke shops, vape stores, liquor retailers, and CBD dispensaries, many of which have integrated hemp-derived THC products to meet growing consumer demand and remain competitive.

The financial consequences of overregulation extend far beyond immediate losses:

- Ohio's small retailers risk losing millions in revenue annually as consumers turn to unregulated alternatives or out-of-state purchases.
- Hemp-derived THC market growth would stall, preventing new businesses, job creation, and local economic development.

- Other states—such as Minnesota, Colorado, and Oregon—are thriving under balanced regulation, while Ohio risks falling behind in innovation, entrepreneurship, and tax revenue.

If S.B. 56 moves forward as written, Ohio will lose businesses, eliminate jobs, and weaken its ability to compete in this emerging market.

Why Younger Generations Are Choosing Hemp-Derived THC Over Alcohol

A clear generational shift is underway. Millennials and Gen Z are increasingly turning to hemp-derived THC products over alcohol, driven by health concerns, changing social norms, and demand for functional alternatives.

- A 2023 Gallup poll found that alcohol consumption among adults aged 18 to 34 dropped from 72% to 62% over the past two decades.
- A 2024 LendingTree survey revealed that 55% of Gen-Zers regret spending so much money on alcohol, fueling interest in health-conscious alternatives like hemp-derived THC beverages.
- Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) affects 10% of Americans over the age of twelve, contributing to over 140,000 deaths annually.
- Excessive alcohol use accounts for 13.5% of deaths among adults aged 20 to 39, emphasizing the need for safer alternatives.

Hemp-derived THC beverages offer a moderate, controlled alternative to alcohol, allowing consumers to enjoy social experiences without the severe health risks associated with excessive drinking. Restricting these products pushes consumers back toward alcohol, rather than supporting safer, well-regulated options that align with evolving health-conscious preferences.

Overregulation Will Hurt, Not Protect, Consumers

Effective regulation should prioritize transparency over prohibition. Limiting hemp-derived THC products to under 10mg per serving would disrupt established businesses that have already invested in compliant formulations, packaging, and distribution—forcing costly reformulations that erode consumer trust and create uncertainty for retailers. These restrictions would also push consumers toward unregulated alternatives, increasing demand for illicit or poorly tested products, while simultaneously crippling small businesses and placing Ohio entrepreneurs at a severe competitive disadvantage compared to states that have embraced this market.

Honoring the Will of Ohio Voters

In November 2023, Ohio voters decisively approved Issue 2, legalizing recreational cannabis for adults over 21 years old, with 57% of the vote. This overwhelming majority made clear that Ohioans support a regulated cannabis market, recognizing its economic and social benefits.

Yet, despite this mandate from the voters, some lawmakers have actively sought to undermine or restrict the measure. Legislative efforts—such as House Bill 160 and Senate Bill 56—seek to limit access, increase criminalization, and restrict product potency, directly contradicting the intent of Issue 2.

These actions disregard the will of the voters and threaten Ohio’s ability to establish a fair and competitive cannabis industry. Instead of obstructing progress, lawmakers should focus on implementing responsible regulations that reflect the clear choice Ohioans made at the ballot box.

Conclusion: Ohio Must Embrace Market Innovation

Ohio does not need prohibition—it needs smart, well-researched regulation. The solution lies in:

- Clear compliance standards
- Transparency in labeling
- Enforceable fees and fines for violations
- Opportunities for responsible market growth

Ohio’s hemp industry represents an opportunity for innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation—but overregulation threatens to destroy that progress.

I urge this committee to carefully consider the far-reaching impact of S.B. 56—not just on business owners like me, but on Ohio’s economy, consumer choice, and its ability to compete in a growing national market. Regulation should be thoughtful, promoting growth, safety, and fairness rather than stifling progress. Instead of imposing unnecessary bans, I encourage this committee to adopt a balanced approach that supports business innovation while safeguarding consumer safety.