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To: Chair Michael Rulli
Vice Chair George Lang
Ranking Member Vernon Sykes
Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee

From: David Mahan
Policy Director
Center for Christian Virtue

Re: Oppose SB 261

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee,

My name is David Mahan and I am here on behalf of the Center for Christian Virtue, Ohio's largest Christian public policy organization. I am pleased to be here today in opposition to SB 261, which proposes to reduce marijuana regulations, expand the number of marijuana dispensaries, and increase the maximum THC limit to 90%.

Assuming that most everyone in this room realizes that this bill makes acquiring "medical marijuana" easier than scoring a date for the prom, I will simply focus my attention today on one of many reasons why that fact is so dangerous for Ohioans. 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 will soon 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 intended to help pave the way for the other two.

In a *Hannah News* interview following the introduction of this bill, one of the sponsors gave us a clue to their "First the Camel's Nose in the tent" approach to marijuana legalization when he stated that, "The industry was [also] trying to talk me into home delivery, and I just don't think we're ready for that yet." I wonder how one might determine that Ohioans are "not ready" for home delivery services, but we are ready for the legalization of marijuana extracts that are up to nine times more potent than that commonly used for medicinal purposes? 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 due to health and safety concerns, or were Ohioans just "not ready" for the 90% THC levels prescribed in this new 2021 version? Who does a bill like this benefit the most - Ohioans who are already struggling with epidemic rates of addiction, or the marijuana industry referenced in the



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interview, 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, Dr. Alfonso Edgar Romero-Sandoval, 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." The 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 would seem to be driving this 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**

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>

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.



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“[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, 2018**⁴

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 “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. Ohio families deserve more than being used as pawns in a game rigged only to benefit the marijuana industry and its Big Tobacco, Big Pharma, and Big Alcohol investors. And as always, CCV will work tirelessly to reveal the true intent of this bill and its sponsors to the people who will ultimately have to bear the weight of its consequences.

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

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>