



Senate Bill 261

Ohio Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee

Prevention Action Alliance

December 8, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Rulli, Vice-Chair Lang, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent written testimony on Senate Bill 261, a bill to revise the medical marijuana program. My name is Fran Gerbig, and I am the Executive Director of Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a statewide nonprofit prevention agency based in Columbus, Ohio and has been in existence for over thirty years. Prevention Action Alliance is dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Our organization offers an abundance of resources, training services, grants and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields.

Since Ohio has implemented a medical marijuana program, neither the FDA nor the American Medical Association has endorsed using marijuana as medicine. The medical benefits of marijuana use are still largely unknown but there are some things we do know that are attributed to its use. People who start smoking marijuana heavily in their teens and have an ongoing marijuana use disorder lose an average of 8 IQ points between ages 13 and 38. These lost mental abilities do not fully return in those who quit marijuana as adults. People who use marijuana are more likely to develop psychosis and long-lasting mental disorders, including schizophrenia. The association between marijuana and schizophrenia is stronger in people who start using marijuana at an earlier age and at a more frequent rate.

The proposed additional recommendations being made to the list of qualifying conditions are concerning as well. There is no viable data to suggest that the use of marijuana is an effective treatment for opioid use disorder. According to Dr. Philip Atkins, Executive Director of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Union County, there are many paths to recovery, but there is no evidence that supports claims that cannabis can treat opioid use disorders. He states "As we consider our role in advocating and providing a robust behavioral health system

of care, it is important to follow science-driven approaches to the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders. Setting a standard for the use of medical marijuana through state policy as a replacement for FDA-approved medications for opioid use disorders is potentially dangerous for our consumers and our communities."¹

In turn, several studies show that 25% to 50% of people who use cannabis daily will develop cannabis use disorder, which certainly would be detrimental for those who have diagnosed with a substance addiction disorder.

The Pharmacy Board is trusted with establishing and monitoring the regulations for all prescribed and recommended drugs in the state. Senate Bill 261 would undo, at least partially, these regulations by removing the medical marijuana program from the Pharmacy Board's control and instead placing it under the Department of Commerce. A department that has a primary purpose of promoting prosperity for business and that will have a vested interest in expanding the business of marijuana rather than protecting the public from the dangerous effects of Schedule I drug that is being promoted as a medicinal solution.

We need to protect and ensure the best outcomes for the youth of Ohio. Youth use social media as their primary means of news, communication, and entertainment, yet this bill looks to allow dispensaries to advertise their products on social media without any prior approval from an overarching regulator. This is concerning when taking into consideration the consumption rate of social media advertising that is done by our youth today. As stated above, the risks to brain development that are caused using marijuana during adolescence are great.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide written testimony. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them via phone or email.

Source for footnote 1: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/article-abstract/2768239>

¹ <https://jamanetworks.com/journals/jamanetworksopen/article-abstract/2768239>