



March 23, 2022

Chairman Wilkin  
Ohio House of Representatives  
Government Oversight Committee

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in response to SB261, which makes significant changes to Ohio's medical marijuana program. My name is Colleen Oakes, and I am an employee at the Montgomery County ADAMHS Board, but today I am representing as the Manager of the Montgomery County Prevention Coalition, based in Dayton. I will also be welcoming my first child in 3 months – so for me, the stakes of this conversation are as important as ever to keep our children safe and protected. The Montgomery County Prevention Coalition, or MCPC, is a group of 224 volunteers focused on reducing substance use and promoting mental wellness in Montgomery County. The volunteers on the MCPC are the individuals that are truly boots on the ground, working with our community members each and every day and seeing the vast impact that substance use and mental health disorders have on our community. Because of this firsthand knowledge, the Marijuana Prevention Committee of the MCPC has a vested interest in this legislation.

As a Coalition that is largely focused on youth prevention, the MCPC's biggest consideration is for our youth and the potentially damaging effects marijuana use can have. No matter what side of the aisle you are on, I know that each and every one of you cares about the health and safety of Ohio's youth. THAT we can all agree on. In Ohio, 39% of the students who've used marijuana have done so before the age of 13<sup>1</sup> and almost 20% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders said they used marijuana in the last 30 days.<sup>2</sup> Studies show us that adolescents who have used marijuana perform poorly in processing speed, memory, flexible thinking, attention learning and overall executive functioning.<sup>3</sup> I realize that this bill may not be targeted toward youth specifically, however, we cannot ignore the fact that adult influencers are one of the most significant impactors in our youth decision making. Any of you that are influencers to the youth in your lives no doubt understand this importance. Because of this – if Ohio expands its medical marijuana program and the substance becomes more available to adults- youth will not only have more avenues to access cannabis, they will also be exposed to more adults using the drug, normalizing its use, and decreasing the perception of harm.

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<sup>1</sup> OHYES! Entire State Report for 2020-2021 (ohio.gov)

<sup>2</sup> \_2020 Student Survey One page summary.pdf (prevention-first.org)

<sup>3</sup> Crean, R. D., Crane, N. A., & Mason, B. J. (2011). An evidence based review of acute and long-term effects of cannabis use on executive cognitive functions. *Journal of addiction medicine*, 5(1), 1–8.

We've seen this scenario play out in other areas of the country that have expanded their marijuana programs. A Smart Approaches to Marijuana study found that living near a marijuana dispensary increases the likelihood and frequency of use among youth.<sup>4</sup> In other states where marijuana has been legalized for medical use, studies have shown an increased sale of marijuana to juveniles and those who do not qualify for a serious medical condition.<sup>5</sup> Since legalizing marijuana, Colorado has seen an increase in traffic fatalities from individuals using marijuana and an increase in marijuana poisonings and hospital visits for children. Additionally, marijuana use in Colorado youth is rising faster than the national average and juvenile marijuana-related offenses are up. There has also been no proven reduction in crime or significant impact on tax revenues from legalization.<sup>6</sup> If we move forward with expanding our medical marijuana program, especially by allowing doctors to offer medical marijuana cards for virtually any reason, we will likely see similar results in Ohio.

As an added step in protecting our youth from the harmful effects of marijuana, we would highly recommend removing the allowance of social media advertising from this bill. A 2020 study found that exposure to cannabis marketing on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram was associated with increased use of the drug. Exposure to advertising plays a significant role in shaping attitudes about marijuana and contributes to increased use and related negative consequences throughout adolescence.<sup>7</sup> I want you to think about that for a second. What would you think if you saw your children or grandchildren scrolling through Instagram and getting advertisements for the closest marijuana dispensary? With the social media allowance provided in the bill, this is almost impossible to avoid. Individuals that legally obtain a medical marijuana card should know how to find the nearest dispensary by using online resources – there is no need for universal advertising on social media.

Additionally, medical marijuana is not a recommended treatment for opioid use disorder – and I am not aware of any substantial research that supports this claim. In 2017, Montgomery County was named the “Epicenter of the Opioid Epidemic.” Largely due to our prevention initiatives in the County, these numbers had been steadily decreasing – until 2020. We saw a spike in overdoses in 2020 and an additional spike in 2021, similar to what other communities are seeing across our state.<sup>8</sup> Our fellow residents are dying and need evidence-based, viable treatment to bring these overdose death numbers back down. We cannot take the chance with people's lives by offering a treatment option that has not been proven to be effective. Because of this, we would recommend removing opioid use disorders as one of the qualifying conditions for medical marijuana.

Our community members, especially youth, have experienced immense trauma in recent years. From living in the epicenter of the opioid epidemic, to living through the coronavirus pandemic, to experiencing 19 tornadoes and a mass shooting in one summer – our community members have had enough. It is my hope that our legislation is based on the best research and evidence to support the needs of our Ohio residents – especially focused on what is best for the health and safety of our youth. There is simply too much at stake to do anything less.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://learnaboutsam.org/new-study-living-near-marijuana-dispensaries-increases-likelihood-of-youth-use-favorable-opinions/>

<sup>5</sup> Marijuana Legalization Will Cause Many Problems for Missouri Law Enforcement and Schools - PMC (nih.gov)

<sup>6</sup> Marijuana Legalization Will Cause Many Problems for Missouri Law Enforcement and Schools - PMC (nih.gov)

<sup>7</sup> Sabet, K. & Jones, W. (2019). Marijuana Legalization in the United States: A Social Injustice. University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law & Public Affairs, 5(1), 15-23.

<sup>8</sup> Data & Reports | Coat (mccoat.org)

Thank you for your concern and attention to the health and wellbeing of our Ohio residents. I appreciate the time to speak with you today and am happy to answer any questions you have.

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