



House Bill 354
Ohio House Finance Committee
December 11, 2024

Chairman Edwards, Vice-Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and esteemed members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide interested party testimony and contribute our perspective on House Bill 354, a pivotal piece of legislation aimed at revising the adult-use marijuana program established in Issue 2. I am Jodi Salvo, representing Empower Tusc, a community coalition dedicated to preventing youth substance use, suicide, and the promotion of positive mental health. I bring to the table a wealth of experience as an Ohio Certified Prevention Consultant, licensed master social worker, and the Director of Substance Use Disorder Prevention at OhioGuidestone. My involvement extends to the Board of Directors for the Ohio Prevention Professionals Association, an advisory board member of Ohio's Statewide Prevention Coalition Association, as well as service on the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board.

I wish to highlight three critical areas that we would like to see careful consideration from this committee: funding for youth prevention education and community coalitions, reduction of the proposed 90% THC limit, and funding for robust data collection.

Prevention Education & Coalition Funding

We strongly advocate for the establishment of a dedicated line item for Substance Use Prevention to support Ohio students through evidence-based prevention education, and substance use prevention and suicide prevention coalitions throughout the State of Ohio. Acknowledging the pivotal role of prevention efforts at the grassroots level, this proactive approach ensures that students across the state receive comprehensive programming proven to be effective in preventing or mitigating youth substance use. To enhance the local infrastructure necessary for successful implementation, I propose directing prevention funding to county Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Boards and Mental Health and Recovery Services (MHRS) Boards. This allocation will facilitate funding for accredited prevention providers in each county, addressing the current limitations faced by many school districts in delivering comprehensive prevention programming. Moreover, extending prevention funding to community substance use and suicide prevention coalitions will empower these entities to implement targeted strategies tailored to their unique community challenges.

Data Collection

In the context of marijuana legalization, comprehensive and systematic data collection are paramount to understanding the multifaceted consequences of this policy shift. Prioritizing data collection on youth use, perceptions of harm, emergency room visits, addiction instances, drug-related driving impairments, and educational outcomes is crucial. This data serves as a valuable tool for communities, substance use prevention coalitions, addiction task forces, and suicide prevention coalitions. A well-established data collection framework enables these entities to proactively address emerging issues, tailor interventions, and safeguard the well-being of our citizens. Informed decision-making grounded in empirical evidence is pivotal to steering our state toward a balanced and responsible approach to marijuana legalization.

In recommending a comprehensive data collection approach, we suggest looking to the model implemented by the state of Colorado. Colorado has successfully collected annual data and released an annual report to systematically track the impacts of marijuana legalization. By adopting a similar annual reporting structure, Ohio can establish a transparent and accountable system for tracking the impact of marijuana legalization. This approach allows for ongoing assessment, facilitates evidence-based decision-making, and provides valuable insights to inform policy adjustments as needed. Additionally, it ensures that stakeholders, including communities, substance use prevention coalitions, addiction task forces, and suicide prevention coalitions, have access to timely and relevant data for crafting effective strategies and interventions.

Potency Limits

We respectfully urge the committee to reconsider the proposed 90% THC limit based on scientific research. High THC limits have been associated with adverse outcomes, including increased mental health issues, suicide rates, schizophrenia, psychosis, and escalated healthcare costs. There are concerns about heightened addiction risks, negative impacts on physical health, and intensified adverse reactions. Before establishing THC limits, I recommend seeking input from experts well-versed in research on high THC levels and their impacts on mental health and addiction. A cautious approach to THC limits, guided by evidence-based considerations, will prioritize the well-being of our communities, especially our youth, mitigating potential adverse effects on mental health and addressing the risk of increased addiction associated with high-potency products.

Thank you Chairman Edwards, Vice-Chair LaRe, and Ranking Member Sweeney for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB354 and thank you for your consideration of these three critical issues. I am available to provide further information, research, or clarification as needed. I can be reached at jodi.salvo@ohioguidestone.org or at (330) 440-7320.