
Prevention Action Alliance

Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

Senate Bill 9

Ohio Senate General Government Committee

Prevention Action Alliance

March 7, 2023

Chairman Rulli, Vice-Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on Senate Bill 9, a bill to revise the medical marijuana program. My name is Frances 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.

Prevention Action Alliance has several concerns to share with the committee today regarding the expansion of SB 9.

Since Ohio has implemented a medical marijuana program, neither the FDA nor the American Medical Association has endorsed using marijuana as medicine. Medical marijuana is not recommended to treat mental illness or addiction and would be detrimental to the mental health of youth and young adults. The medical benefits of marijuana use are still largely unknown, but research has documented negative outcomes known to be attributed to its use.

This legislation will have adverse impact to Ohioans by raising the permissible tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content of extracts from 70 percent to 90 percent. 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 to 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. Studies have found direct associations between how much a user ingests, how regularly they ingest it, how strong the THC is to how likely the user is to develop mental health issues. By increasing the THC content extract cap percentage, youth and young adults are particularly at risk.

The proposed recommendations to expand the list of qualifying conditions are concerning as well. The broad language that creates physician discretion could also lead to physician recommendations for the treatment of depression and/or anxiety disorders where there is no empirical evidence that the use of marijuana is an effective treatment. Several studies show that 25% to 50% of people who use cannabis daily will develop cannabis use disorder² which certainly would be detrimental for those who have diagnosed with a substance addiction disorder. Mental health issues often begin with depression and anxiety and can develop into addiction and psychosis, which include suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Data released in February 2023 show that suicide rates for all young people ages 15 – 24 increased 7% in 2021.³ It is critical that our state implements and supports strategies to prevent suicide. Reducing access to marijuana is a prevention strategy that creates a protective environment.⁴

We need to protect and ensure the best outcomes for the youth of Ohio and recommend the creation of more regulation regarding media and advertisement from medical marijuana retailers. 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. A California study⁵ identified that marijuana retailers were taking a page out of the tobacco-industry playbook and creating youth appealing marketing campaigns similar to “Joe Camel”, celebrity endorsed flavored vapes as well as flavors like “girl scout cookies”. Youth exposure to positive marijuana messages increases their risk of marijuana use, as well as decreases their perception of danger. Social media allows cannabis brands to reach a new level of engagement and interaction with youth. As stated above, the risks to brain development that are caused using marijuana during adolescence are great.

The Pharmacy Board is trusted with establishing and monitoring the regulations for all prescribed and recommended drugs in the state. Senate Bill 9 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. The Department of Commerce has as its primary purpose the promotion of prosperity for business. As such, it 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. At a time when Ohio families are grappling with unprecedented addiction and increased mental health needs compounded by the aftermath of a global pandemic, we consider the commercialization of an addictive drug to be an unnecessary risk.

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.

1 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2698365> 2
<https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.pn.2021.7>

2 <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.pn.2021.7.20>

3 [U.S. Teen Girls Experiencing Increased Sadness and Violence | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC](#)

4 [Prevention Strategies | Suicide | CDC](#)

5 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2767359?widget=personalizedcontent&previousarticle=0>