

Dear Senators,

I am writing to share my concerns about multiple cannabis bills currently being proposed. My main concern is how these changes in cannabis law will ultimately affect our youth.

I have worked in the field of youth substance misuse prevention for close to 30 years, striving to promote an environment where youth are substance free and healthy. This is accomplished by promoting protective factors and reducing risk factors. Every policy decision at the state level affects each of these factors and how youth view substance use.

What has proven effective in substance misuse prevention is limiting access, increasing perception of harm, increasing price and community norms that support non-use by minors. When the cannabis market was first legalized, I felt that Vermont was a leader in regulating cannabis with a protective, public health approach as a priority over profit. Having public consumption prohibited; limits on potency; purchasing amount limits; higher cost with an excise tax (with a percentage designated for prevention); and advertising restrictions all contributed to efforts to keep our youth safe and healthy. Bill S.278 goes against every one of the evidence-based strategies to prevent youth cannabis use.

Vermont already has the highest use of cannabis among youth and young adults in this country. If anything, we should be looking at what more can be done to address this issue. According to the Times Herald Record, several U.S. states are doing just that by moving to decrease cannabis and intoxicating hemp product potency due to public health concerns, particularly regarding youth, mental health, and high-potency concentrates. Key states leading this effort include California, Oregon, Texas, Montana and New York.

My main concern with this bill is that it will lead to even higher youth cannabis use. Below are my thoughts:

- 1) **Advertising** affects youth perception of harm and normalizes use. Regular exposure to cannabis advertising on storefronts, newspapers, retailer websites and other locations increases the likelihood of youth seeing cannabis use as normal and reducing perception of harm.
- 2) **Potency** limits. There is substantial evidence that due to the teen brain not being fully developed, alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis dependence problems surface more quickly when use of these drugs starts before adulthood. Higher potency exposure and early use of cannabis increases risk and can increase the likelihood of going on to use other drugs and of developing a substance use disorder and mental health issues.
- 3) **Access**- expanding geographic density and purchase amounts leads to more youth exposure and more opportunities for cannabis to reach kids and teens, often through friends or family members.
- 4) **Price**-Lower prices are associated with higher use, particularly among youth and frequent users, who are shown to be price sensitive, with higher prices showing lower use. Currently, 30% of the cannabis excise tax is allocated to fund prevention efforts, by cutting the tax the State will potentially increase use while reducing prevention funding.

5) **Community Norms**- expanded consumption settings equal more youth exposure to cannabis use and normalization.

Vermont has been a leader in taking a different approach and prioritizing public health over profit. Let's not go backwards on this commitment.

Sincerely,
Cindy Hayford
Wilmington VT.