

Dear Senators of the Economic Development Committee,

I heard that this week you will be taking testimony on S.278, a bill that appears to have a goal to increase cannabis use in Vermont. I wanted to share my concern about this bill and the direction it will likely push our state in. I work in the substance misuse prevention field and am a mother of two young adults in Essex Junction. For both reasons the laws and regulations in VT for cannabis are very important to me, and I believe that public health and wellbeing, particularly of our most vulnerable Vermonters, should always take priority over commercial interests.

This bill chips away at the protections VT worked to put in place when cannabis was legalized to reduce the negative consequences other states were seeing from cannabis commercialization. I've been involved in the conversation about cannabis policy for 10+ years now and initially VT legislators said they wanted VT cannabis legalization regulations to limit another industry from using the predatory practices Big Alcohol and Big Tobacco have used for decades. However, **this bill does all the things research has told us again and again lead to increased addiction and make it more likely that young people will start using early.** S.278 almost reads like that is the goal - to get more people using and using at increased rates. I have the utmost respect for the dedication and energy that you and all the VT Legislators put into your work in our statehouse and I cannot believe that this is the intention. Our goal as a state should never be to increase or normalize substance use, regardless of the substance.

However, I am concerned, because this bill reads like a common 4 P's marketing strategy (price, product, place, promotion) for cannabis. The bill increases potency and the amount that can be possessed (product), reduces advertising restrictions (promotion), increases where cannabis can be sold (place) and reduces tax (price). While this may be good for the growers, distribution and retail industry it is NOT good for the public and our long term health.

Vermont already has the highest reported use of cannabis in the nation and also has one of the highest rates of use among our youth and young adults. **We need strategies that acknowledge this as a problem and address it.** Especially because:

- Use of cannabis products with potency greater than 15% THC is associated with increased urgent and emergency department psychiatric visits and increased mental health disorders, including psychosis. HIGH-POTENCY THC CONCENTRATED CANNABIS PRODUCTS ARE NOT MEDICINE – IASIC
- Addiction/daily use of cannabis has been increasing in VT and across the nation. Daily marijuana use is now more common than daily alcohol use in the U.S., new study finds | PBS News
- Regular cannabis use is leading to serious illness Prevalence and Correlates of Symptoms of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome in the United States | medRxiv 17.8% of people who use cannabis daily reported CHS-like symptoms (i.e., severe nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain).

We have learned so much in the last 10-15 years about the significant health consequences associated with cannabis and there continues to be a growing body of research where I am learning more all the time. However, the public understanding of this substance hasn't caught up with the research. Industry interests are continuing to shape the story around cannabis and Vermonters need more good information about the health risks of use before there are any considerations about increasing access. I believe it was irresponsible of the state to legalize this substance when it was clear that folks are so misinformed about the health risks. We need a well-funded public health campaign before doing anything that increases access. As a public health professional I urge you to work further upstream with us and put more guardrails up so many people do not keep falling into the river of addiction needing more urgent resources downstream.

I want the regulation that legislators promised when they commercialized another industry in Vermont that makes a profit off of addiction.

Thank you for your dedication to our state and communities.

Take care,

Mariah

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Mariah Flynn (she/her)