

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Joe Kennedy. I am a medical toxicologist and emergency physician at the University of Vermont, and a parent and neighbor in Charlotte, VT. I am writing in strong opposition to S.278 — specifically, the provisions that would allow higher-potency cannabis products into our communities.

I want to start with a few anecdotes, and hopefully put faces on this issue. I have personally cared for a teenager who nearly died from daily THC dabs. He developed cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome--unrelenting nausea and vomiting--and burned himself raw taking scalding showers to try to make it stop. He left the hospital with ruptured lungs, fluid around his heart, and injuries that will follow him for the rest of his life. He is a child from our community.

I helped care for a toddler who stopped breathing after ingesting a high-potency edible. We intubated that child and put them on a ventilator.

I have cared for multiple children admitted across the UVM network with neurological symptoms--uncontrolled jerking movements that look exactly like seizures--traced back to potent edible ingestion, requiring prolonged hospitalizations and extensive testing to rule out something worse.

These are not statistics. These are Vermont children.

Our emergency department visits for cannabis-related complications (including cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome and pediatric exposures) are rising at a concerning rate. The medical literature is unambiguous: higher-potency products, especially concentrates, are associated with worse health outcomes, higher rates of cannabis use disorder, and more severe withdrawal. Potency is not a neutral variable.

I want to be clear: I fully support the right of informed adults to use cannabis. It is woven into Vermont's economic, social, and cultural fabric, and I respect that. But the implications of S.278 are not a modest step forward--they represent a meaningful escalation in risk to our children and our communities. The benefit-to-risk ratio does not favor this change. The evidence does not support it.

I respectfully urge this committee to reject the potency cap increases in S.278. I am available to discuss any of this further and welcome your questions. Thank you for your hard work on this committee and for your service to Vermonters!

Regards,
Joe