

Pennsylvania House Health Committee Hearing on Marijuana Legalization
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What is at risk if Pennsylvania legalizes marijuana for recreational retail sale?

There are some PA state legislators who have attempted humor to answer this question. One PA State Representative claims the only thing in danger with marijuana use and the only risk in the state legalizing its retail sale is a bag of potato chips - alluding to having “the munchies” after marijuana use.¹

On the other hand, there are state legislators who have witnessed first-hand the devastating impact marijuana use has had on their family. For PA State Rep. Brian Smith, he will never vote yes on non-medical legalization and marijuana’s widespread use. His son’s marijuana use started a path towards more drug use and addiction, ultimately ending with a fatal drug overdose. “Please understand the negatives of this drug,” pleads Rep. Smith. “It’s not worth the negatives.”

Other current PA state representatives have family who have been ravaged by drug addiction, with marijuana identified as their first abused drug.

There is nothing comical with pushing Pennsylvania to legalize today’s modern marijuana for recreational use: industrialized, high-potent THC products with proven addictive and harmful traits.

If a case of “the munchies” is the only risk with the state endorsing a mind-altering Schedule 1 drug for recreational use, then why are so many mainstream health associations opposed to its legalization?

¹ Rep. Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia): [Rally comments](#), January 23, 2018, "We know that cannabis is not dangerous. We know that cannabis is not addictive. And we know that the only thing that is in jeopardy when we legalize cannabis is potato chips. And Fritos." Marijuana is a substance that is "not harmful to anyone." [Tweet](#) on February 2, 2019, "Only thing in danger when smoking weed is a [bag] of chips."

- **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)** “opposes legalization of marijuana because of the potential harms to children and adolescents.”²
- **American Medical Association (AMA)** “believes that the sale of cannabis for adult use should not be legalized” and that marijuana “is a dangerous drug and as such is a serious public health concern.”³
- **American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)** “opposes the recreational use of marijuana.”⁴
- **American Society for Addiction Medicine (ASAM)** “does not support the legalization of marijuana.”⁵
- **Association for Addiction Professionals** “does not support the legalization of cannabis for recreational use, largely due to the addictive nature of cannabis.”⁶
- **Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA)**: “Because of the health hazards and social ramifications of recreational marijuana use, CMDA does not support its legalization.”⁷

As science catches up and more results come in from states experimenting with full marijuana legalization, we are seeing more and more evidence for why Pennsylvania should oppose any push for legalized recreational (non-medical) use.

What is meant by “legalization”

Discussions surrounding marijuana legalization can lead to misunderstanding of the terms. “The term ‘legalization’ is often used rather broadly,” identifies the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). “However, at the state level, marijuana can be divided into four distinct legal categories.”⁸ These four categories are:

1. Non-medical legalization
2. Medical legalization
3. Decriminalization
4. Illegal

²*The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update*, [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#), March 1, 2015.

³*Cannabis Legalization for Recreational Use – Policy Finder*, [American Medical Association](#), Last modified 2023.

⁴*Marijuana Possession for Personal Use*, [The American Academy of Family Physicians](#), 2019.

⁵ [Marijuana Legalization: Protecting Public Health and Safety in a Volatile Legal Landscape](#), American Society of Addiction Medicine.

⁶ *NAADAC Position Statement on the Legalization and Criminalization of Cannabis*, [The Association for Addiction Professionals](#).

⁷ *Recreational Marijuana Public Policy Statement*, [Christian Medical & Dental Associations](#).

⁸ [Preventing Marijuana Use Among Youth – Evidence-Based Resource Guide Series](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2021.

Table 1. Four distinct legal categories of marijuana. Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Non-Medical Legalization	Medical Legalization	Decriminalized	Illegal
The possession of marijuana is permitted for both medical and/or non-medical purposes by the state. Non-medical use is limited to adults aged 21 and older. Also referred to as “recreational and adult use.”	The possession of marijuana is permitted by the state when recommended for medical purposes only.	Decriminalization can be full or partial and means that lesser marijuana violations, such as possession of small amounts, will typically be civil infractions or misdemeanors and will not result in imprisonment.	The possession of marijuana is not permitted for any purpose and is subject to both state and federal prosecution.
It is important to note that these categories may not be mutually exclusive in every state. For example, a state may have decriminalized marijuana while it is still illegal.			

There can be a false dichotomy presented in this debate, which can suggest the only option for change is to fully legalize an addictive and harmful drug.

When these four distinct categories of marijuana legalization are accurately presented, there can often be a change in perceived support for full non-medical marijuana legalization. Pennsylvania operates a medical use program, and while discussions on improvements to this existing program can and should be had - along with areas of our criminal justice system, it is a vastly different discussion to allow today’s modern, industrialized marijuana products to be marketed and made available for retail sale in local communities through non-medical legalization.

Potency

Modern marijuana legalization means industrialized, genetically-engineered, high-potency THC marijuana products being marketed and sold for retail consumption in local communities. These products would include marijuana extracts like edibles – and its kids’ menu of candies and gummies. It includes concentrates in every flavor of the rainbow available for use in vape pens.

In states like Washington, one of the first to experiment with legalization, they have seen an explosion of dangerously-high THC manufactured marijuana extracts.⁹ “Highly potent manufactured cannabis products are available in retail stores, with THC content varying from 60-90%,” states Dr. Beatriz H. Carlini with the School of Public Health at the University of Washington. “They don’t resemble the plant — they are as close to the cannabis plant as strawberries are to frosted strawberry pop tarts. Manufactured cannabis extracts now represent 35% of the WA cannabis market, up from 9% in 2014. With such rapid change, science is lagging behind.”¹⁰

This is in large part why the Seattle Times Editorial Board is advocating for a cap on high-potency marijuana. “Twenty years ago, prescription opioids were seen as a breakthrough in pain relief. We understand now the human costs of addiction and dysfunction. This state should not make the same mistake with high-potency marijuana.”¹¹

⁹ [High THC policy | Final report](#), Washington State Health Care Authority, December 31, 2022.

¹⁰ PRSC Cannabis Concentration Workgroup (2020). [Cannabis Concentration and Health Risks](#): A Report for the Washington State Prevention Research Subcommittee (PRSC). Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

¹¹ [WA lawmakers must cap the potency of marijuana products](#), Seattle Times, October 28, 2022.

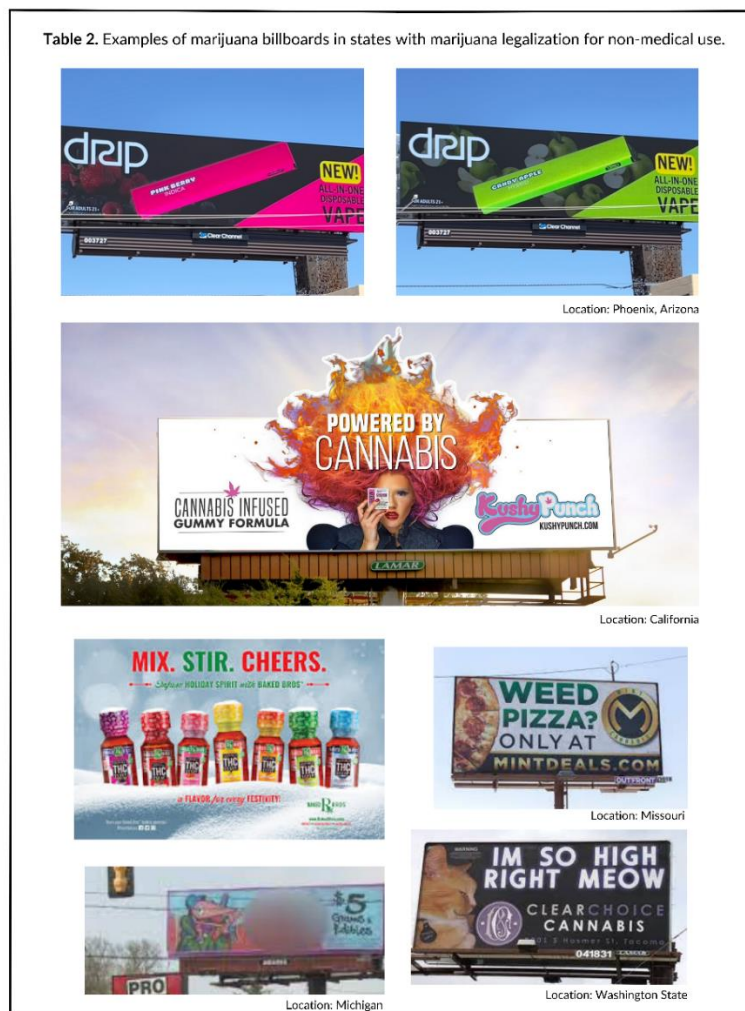
Ten Risks with Marijuana Legalization for Retail (Non-medical) Sale

Every Pennsylvania lawmaker should analyze the existing science and evidence of state marijuana legalization, which reveals a host of real negative consequences. Here are ten examples of harms that Pennsylvania families and local communities would face by allowing today's modern, industrialized marijuana to be sold for non-medical use:

1. Increased exposure to advertising that targets young users.

Exposure to marijuana marketing is linked with increased use.¹² Studies have shown adolescents who see billboards advertising marijuana are seven times more likely to use marijuana weekly and six times more likely to develop cannabis use disorder (CUD).¹³

See Table 2 for examples of marijuana advertisements in states experimenting with legalization.



¹² [Preventing Marijuana Use Among Youth – Evidence-Based Resource Guide Series](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2021.

¹³ *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Cannabis Marketing and Problematic Cannabis Use Among Adolescents*, March 2021.

Parents in states where non-medical use of marijuana is legal are disgusted with the “in-your-face cannabis culture.”¹⁴ In California, their bill to commercialize the sale of marijuana included the “toughest-in-the-nation protections for children” on advertising. Since it became law, “it’s been a nonstop game of whack-a-mole to try to keep the pot industry and cannabis regulators faithful to these promises.”¹⁵

Big Tobacco, and their addiction-for-profit playbook that targets teenagers, is heavily invested in pushing states to allow for recreational use of marijuana, investing billions in the marijuana industry.¹⁶ As written by High Times, “cannabis is the future, while tobacco is increasingly a relic of the past.”

According to SAMHSA, the vast majority (87%) of marijuana users start before age 18.¹⁷ Big Tobacco knows this full well. They are using their same playbook for growing addiction to nicotine and applying it to the marijuana industry.

2. Increases in Marijuana Use Disorder (MUD).

According to American Addiction Centers, there are eleven symptoms of marijuana use disorder (MUD).¹⁸ A person that manifests just two of the eleven symptoms over the same 12-month period is diagnosed with MUD, and the number of symptoms determines whether a person is diagnosed with a mild, moderate or severe MUD.

"People who begin using marijuana at or before the age of 18 are 4 to 7 times more likely to develop a marijuana use disorder than adults who did not use under age 18."¹⁹

According to a study by the Journal of the American Medical Association, non-medical marijuana legalization is associated with a 25% increase in marijuana use disorder among 12-17-year-olds.²⁰

In 2022, research shows past-year marijuana use, daily use, and marijuana vaping for adults 19 to 30 years old is at the highest levels ever reported.²¹

¹⁴ [I'm a mom. I'm sick of this in-your-face cannabis culture](#). Editorial, Los Angeles Times, April 17, 2020.

¹⁵ [Billboard advertising pot broke Prop. 64's promise. Don't go back on the pledge to protect teens](#), Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, January 2, 2022.

¹⁶ [Why is Big Tobacco Getting Big Into Weed](#), Bloomberg, October 4, 2022.

¹⁷ [Marijuana Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Aged 18 to 30: Early vs. Adult Initiation](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), The Treatment Episode Data Set Report.

¹⁸ [Marijuana Use Disorder: Signs of Marijuana Use, Abuse & Addiction](#), [American Addiction Centers](#), Updated January 9, 2023.

¹⁹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), [Preventing Marijuana Use Among Youth – Evidence-Based Resource Guide Series](#), 2021.

²⁰ [Association between recreational marijuana legalization in the United States and changes in marijuana use and cannabis use disorder from 2008 to 2016](#), JAMA Psychiatry, 2020.

²¹ [Marijuana and hallucinogen use, binge drinking reached historic highs among adults 35 to 50](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse, August 17, 2023.

3. Higher rates of mental health problems.

The Center for Disease Control finds marijuana use, “has been linked to a range of mental health problems,” such as depression, social anxiety, thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts, and suicide.²²

Marijuana is increasingly linked to severe consequences for mental health such as psychosis and schizophrenia. A 2023 NIH study found young men are particularly at risk for developing schizophrenia. Study authors estimated that as many as 30% of cases of schizophrenia among men aged 21-30 might have been prevented by averting cannabis use disorder.²³

Several warnings are given by the American Psychiatric Association, including opposition to marijuana use by children, adolescents and young adults up to age 25,²⁴ as well as opposition to using marijuana as medicine; pointing to current evidence that supports a strong association of marijuana use with the onset of psychiatric disorders.²⁵ States legalizing non-medical use have spurred unprecedented varieties of purported antidotes with its use, “claims that have yet to be validated by research.”²⁶

Additionally, despite Pennsylvania’s medical program allowing for the use of marijuana for opioid use disorder, the FDA has not approved the cannabis plant itself for any health condition, and cannabis and cannabinoids are not approved to help combat opioid addiction or to relieve depression and anxiety.²⁷

It would appear Gov. Josh Shapiro’s priority of increasing access to mental health resources in schools does not align with his advocacy for non-medical marijuana use in Pennsylvania.

4. Increased access and marketing results in more children and young adult users.

A 2023 study by researchers at Temple University found that states legalizing marijuana for recreational use saw an increase in use among minors and young adults. “The legalization and commercialization of cannabis is associated with risk factors for cannabis use disorder (CUD), including easier access to cannabis, stronger cannabis potency, greater variety of cannabis products, and exposure to cannabis advertising and sales.”²⁸

Another 2023 study found a similar conclusion that legalization leads to higher rates of marijuana use for young adults ages 18-25.²⁹

²² What You Need To Know About Marijuana Use and Teens, [Center for Disease Control](#).

²³ [Young men at highest risk of schizophrenia linked with cannabis use disorder](#), NIDA News Release, May 4, 2023.

²⁴ [Position Statement on the Impact of Cannabis on Children and Adolescents](#), American Psychiatric Association, December 2020.

²⁵ [Position Statement in Opposition to Cannabis as Medicine](#), American Psychiatric Association, July 2019.

²⁶ [How does marijuana affect the brain? Psychological researchers examine impact on different age groups over time](#), American Psychiatric Association, June 1, 2023.

²⁷ [Cannabis: The Facts You Need to Know](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 2022.

²⁸ [Recreational cannabis legalization alters associations among cannabis use, perception of risk, and cannabis use disorder treatment for adolescents and young adults](#), [Addictive Behaviors](#), March 2023.

²⁹ [Marijuana linked to mental health risks in young adults, growing evidence shows](#), NBC News, May 25, 2023.

The marijuana industry is outpacing popular food chains in states with marijuana legalization. In Colorado, there are more marijuana shops than McDonalds and Starbucks combined. In 2019, there were over 1,000 registered retail and medical marijuana locations combined, compared with 392 Starbucks and 208 McDonalds.³⁰

While science is playing catch-up, one finding with a broad base of existing evidence shows the connection between early marijuana use and worse outcomes. Evidence shows rates of addiction nearly double when you start using before age 18.³¹ "Recent research estimated that approximately 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have marijuana use disorder. For people who begin using marijuana before age 18, the risk of developing marijuana use disorder is even greater."³²

Making it easier to find marijuana products than a Big Mac or a Starbucks Pumpkin Spice Latte is not a healthy environment for Pennsylvania families.

5. More high school and college drop outs.

In Pennsylvania's 500 school districts, like West Shore School District in Camp Hill, marijuana use - particularly with vape pens - has become a significant problem.³³ "It seems students have learned how to hide the vapes in school and have found areas within the school to go undetected while using them... People like vapes due to the fact that you can hide them and they do not necessarily leave a cloud of smoke or smell behind," states Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Cynthia Schick.³⁴

"We've definitely seen an increase of vaping with THC-based products," stated Butler Area School Superintendent Brian White, after two students were hospitalized after using a THC vape pen.³⁵ "Addiction and drug use is a ladder. So if our kids are experimenting with THC products, what's the next step?"

Evidence shows how increasing accessibility to marijuana through state legalization results in more students being harmed and dropping out of high school and college. "Using marijuana can lead to worse educational outcomes," states SAMHSA.³⁶ The CDC agrees: "Compared with teens who do not use marijuana, teens who use marijuana are more likely to quit high school or not get a college degree."³⁷

³⁰ Colorado Department of Revenue, [MED licensed facilities](#), 2019 [Accessed July 9, 2021].

³¹ [Know the Risks of Marijuana](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [Accessed October 25, 2023].

³² [Data and Statistics](#), Center for Disease Control.

³³ "The last year plus we started seeing more THC in those vape pens." Dr. Todd Stoltz, Superintendent of West Shore School District says. *Vape pens containing dangerous drugs found in another Central PA school district*, [CBS 21](#), March 10, 2022.

³⁴ *Trooper: Vaping a 'huge problem in schools.'* [Times Observer](#), June 25, 2022.

³⁵ *2 Butler Area Senior High School students hospitalized after using THC vape pen*, CBS News ([KDKA Pittsburgh](#)), March 23, 2023.

³⁶ [Marijuana: The Risks Are Real](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

³⁷ [What You Need To Know About Marijuana Use and Teens](#), Center for Disease Control, Page last reviewed: September 8, 2021.

6. More young child ER visits from marijuana exposure.

The commercialization of marijuana in states condoning non-medical use has contributed to a significant increase in emergency room visits from marijuana exposure, particularly with children. Many of these exposures have involved the ingesting of marijuana edibles. “There has been a consistent increase in pediatric edible cannabis exposures over the past 5 years, with the potential for significant toxicity,” one study found.³⁸

This health risk increase has been a consistent finding among legalized states:

- Colorado: A 2016 study in JAMA Pediatrics found “almost half of the patients seen in the children’s hospital in the two years after legalization had exposures from recreational marijuana, suggesting that legalization did affect the incidence of exposures.”³⁹
- Washington State: One study found the rate of pediatric exposures to marijuana among children aged 9 or younger was 2.3 times higher following legalization.⁴⁰
- Illinois: Days after legalization doctors reported a surge in emergency room visits and hospitalizations for marijuana. In Cook County, only three children were hospitalized for THC exposure in 2017; yet in 2021, 124 children were hospitalized.⁴¹
- Michigan: In 2017, before state legalization, there were only six cases of children exposed to marijuana edibles. In 2021, the Michigan poison center had 211 cases of children under 19 exposed to edibles, with 156 of those cases involving children under age 5.⁴²

“There is no other drug or substance found in a palatable attractive vehicle innately sought out by young children. With THC concentrations anywhere from 5 to over 100 mg in a single gummy candy, cookie, or brownie, the potential ingested dose can be large and lead to significant symptoms and hospitalizations.”⁴³

There is also evidence of more adults entering emergency rooms following legalization, including older adults.⁴⁴

Pet exposure problems increase as well. “We see so many THC toxicities on a weekly bases in any ER urgent care and the vast majority of these cases are dogs with edibles,” says Erik Olstad, a health sciences assistant professor of clinical medicine and epidemiology at UC Davis

³⁸ [Pediatric Edible Cannabis Exposures and Acute Toxicity: 2017-2021](#), American Academy of Pediatrics, January 3, 2023.

³⁹ [Unintentional Pediatric Exposures to Marijuana in Colorado, 2009-2015](#), JAMA Pediatrics, September 6, 2016.

⁴⁰ [Unintentional pediatric marijuana exposures prior to and after legalization and commercial availability of recreational marijuana in Washington State](#), Journal of Emergency Medicine, 2019.

⁴¹ [Growing number of children in Illinois being hospitalized after consuming edibles](#), FOX32 Chicago, December 19, 2022.

⁴² [Steep increase of kids accidentally eating cannabis edibles, data shows](#), The Washington Post, January 3, 2023.

⁴³ [Pediatric Concerns Due to Expanded Cannabis Use: Unintended Consequences of Legalization](#), Journal of Medical Toxicology, March 2017.

⁴⁴ [Trends in emergency department visits associated with cannabis use among older adults in California, 2005-2019](#), Journal of American Geriatric Society, April 7, 2023.

Veterinary Medicine.⁴⁵ "Though THC-related deaths of children or animals are rare, it can happen when a very high level of THC is ingested."

7. More car accidents and fatalities.

Research on states that have legalized the recreational use of marijuana reveals a subsequent increase in the rate of traffic crash injuries and fatalities.⁴⁶ The National Institute on Drug Abuse warns about getting behind the wheel when using marijuana, finding marijuana roughly doubles a driver's chances of being in a crash.⁴⁷

The first two states to experiment with marijuana legalization for non-medical use were Washington State and Colorado. In Washington State, the share of drivers involved in fatal crashes, with THC in their system, doubled after marijuana was legalized.⁴⁸ In Colorado, it was shown that traffic deaths went up by 75 per year since full legalization.⁴⁹

These findings are in large part why the American Automobile Association (AAA) is opposed to the legalization of marijuana for recreational use because of the "inherent traffic safety risks."⁵⁰

The rise in car accidents and traffic fatalities after legalization is also consistent with findings from Canada, where marijuana legalization went into effect in 2018. Just after legalization, researchers found a 94% increase in emergency room visits.⁵¹ "Cannabis is also probably under-reported in car crashes, and so the absolute number might be way higher," states Dr. Marco Solmi, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Ottawa.

Additionally, law enforcement associations are collectively opposed to legalization for non-medical use, including the PA Fraternal Order of Police and the PA Chiefs of Police Association, in part because there is no standard analysis available that identifies the level of impairment of a driver who has used marijuana.

8. The illicit market continues to expand.

A recent CBS Saturday Morning News segment reported, "the illegal marijuana trade is still flourishing, even in a state like California where pot's been legal for six years."⁵²

It is no secret that the black market is thriving in legalized states. One national headline from 2022 reads, "An exploding black market in states that legalized pot has sparked another

⁴⁵ "The marijuana edible industry is growing fast—and so are the rates of overdoses among kids and pets. Here's how to keep them safe," [Forbes](#), December 24, 2022.

⁴⁶ [Legalization of marijuana linked to increased traffic crashes, fatalities](#), Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, July 18, 2022.

⁴⁷ [Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Updated July 2018.

⁴⁸ [AAA Researches Marijuana in Fatal Crashes after Legalization](#), AAA, January 30, 2020.

⁴⁹ Colorado traffic deaths up 75 per year

⁵⁰ [Fatal Crashes Involving Drivers Who Test Positive for Marijuana Increase After State Legalizes Drug](#), American Automobile Association (AAA) Newsroom, January 30, 2020.

⁵¹ [Driving while stoned leads to more traffic accidents in a country where marijuana is legal](#), CNN, September 6, 2023.

⁵² [Why the illegal weed market is still thriving in states with legal marijuana](#), CBS News, December 17, 2022.

government war on marijuana.”⁵³ Politico put it this way: “States with some of the largest legal markets are also dealing with rampant illegal production — and the problem is getting worse.”⁵⁴

One U.S. attorney in Colorado concluded their state “has become the epicenter of black market marijuana in the United States. It’s impacting communities, it’s impacting neighborhoods, and it’s impacting public safety.”⁵⁵

The LA Times found that in many of California’s largest cultivation areas, unlicensed operations outnumbered licensed farms by as much as 10 to 1; non-medical marijuana legalization “triggered a surge in illegal cannabis on a scale California has never before witnessed.”⁵⁶

One thing is certain: state marijuana legalization has clearly not shut down the black market.

9. Increased crime at dispensaries and arrests related to marijuana use.

A new analysis of social costs with marijuana legalization for recreational use found one significant cost was an increase in arrests. One study found there was a significant increase of 465 total arrests per capita per year, a nearly 13% increase relative to the mean arrest rate under no legalization. Post legalization, “arrests for both violent and property crimes rose, suggesting a potential increase in law enforcement activity.”⁵⁷ (“State-level crime and arrest information were taken from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Crime Data Explorer.”)

In 2022, licensed businesses in California reported 329 break-ins or burglaries with losses, more than double the 147 burglaries reported in 2021.⁵⁸

Making a correlation between increased violent crime and marijuana legalization can be difficult, but legalizing an addiction-for-profit marijuana industry, which target minority communities when locating retail dispensaries, should not be viewed as a reliable solution to making changes to incarceration levels within certain communities.

10. Increased risks to workplace safety.

According to Quest Diagnostics, from 2021 to 2022, the percentage of employees in safety-sensitive workplaces testing positive for marijuana increased 17% in states in which marijuana for recreational use is legal, compared to 5.9% in states in which marijuana for medical use is legal.⁵⁹ “Changing attitudes toward [marijuana] use could pose heightened risks especially in

⁵³ [The New Weed Whackers](#), City Journal, October 24, 2022.

⁵⁴ [Why Legal Weed Didn’t Kill Oregon’s Black Market](#), Politico, January 14, 2022.

⁵⁵ [Forty-two Individuals Arrested in One Of The Largest Black Market Marijuana Takedowns In Colorado History](#), U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Colorado, May 24, 2019.

⁵⁶ [The reality of legal weed in California: Huge illegal grows, violence, worker exploitation and deaths](#), LA Times, September 8, 2022.

⁵⁷ [Economic Benefits and Social Costs of Legalizing Recreational Marijuana](#), Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, September 28, 2023.

⁵⁸ [Pot Shop Burglaries, Thefts and Losses More Than Doubled in California](#), The San Francisco Standard, April 7, 2023.

⁵⁹ [Post-Accident Workforce Drug Positivity for Marijuana Reached 25-Year High in 2022, Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index Analysis Finds](#), Quest Diagnostics, May 18, 2023.

safety-sensitive positions and those states exploring legalization,” stated Dr. Barry Sample, senior director of science and technology for Quest Diagnostics.

Additional analysis found marijuana positivity for drug tests increased 2.5 times in states where marijuana was legalized for non-medical sales. “Increases in positivity rates for marijuana in the general U.S. workforce were most striking in states that have enacted recreational use statutes since 2016.”⁶⁰

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) shares how studies have shown links between marijuana use and increased risk for injury or accidents in the workplace. “One study among postal workers found that employees who tested positive for marijuana on a pre-employment urine drug test had 55% more industrial accidents, 85% more injuries, and 75% greater absenteeism compared with those who tested negative for marijuana use.”⁶¹

New policy challenges in states experimenting with marijuana legalization include the outlawing of pre-employment drug tests, as well as opening the door to a myriad of lawsuits against employers, especially with a lack of a standard blood-limit for marijuana.

Incurred costs outweigh any projected revenues

“Weighing benefits against costs is the way most people make decisions—and the way most businesses make decisions if they want to stay in business. Only in government is any benefit, however small, considered to be worth any cost, however large.” - Thomas Sowell

Revenue projections for non-medical marijuana legalization in Pennsylvania by pro-marijuana politicians have been all over the map. It started back in 2018 with former Auditor General Eugene DePasquale claiming up to \$581 million annually, albeit through a 35 percent sales tax. Since then, revenue estimates have ranged from Gov. Josh Shapiro’s \$188 million projection by the fourth fiscal year of legalization, using a 20% wholesale tax in his latest 2023-2024 state budget, to \$1 billion revenue claims by officials like Democrat U.S. Senator John Fetterman.

With any of these revenue projections, it appears not one has had an accompanying cost analysis. It is a disservice to the people of Pennsylvania to simply rely on projected revenue models without any effort to project the costs that would come with allowing the retail sale of genetically-engineered marijuana products in local communities for non-medical use.

One study in Colorado attempts to provide some cost analysis, and found that for every dollar in reported revenue from marijuana, \$4.50 is spent to mitigate the effects.⁶² This study analyzed a variety of cost impact areas, including health care, traffic, productivity (education, employment, and income), crime, housing, and natural environment.

⁶⁰ [Workforce Drug Positivity at Highest Rate in a Decade, Finda Analysis of More Than 10 Million Drug Test Results](#), Quest Diagnostics, May 8, 2018.

⁶¹ [How does marijuana use affect school, work, and social life?](#), Research Report, National Institute on Drug Abuse, July 2020.

⁶² [Economic and Social Costs of Legalized Marijuana](#), Centennial Institute, 2018.

Another fiscal impact study by The New York State Sheriff's Association found upfront budgetary costs to law enforcement and emergency services to be in the range of \$190 million - \$235 million, and ongoing costs in the range of \$157 million to \$192 million annually. ⁶³

“No amount of tax revenue, no amount of contributions to the budget of the state of Pennsylvania, is worth sacrificing the safety and well-being of our citizens, especially our youth.” – Judge Cheryl Allen, Former Pennsylvania Superior Court Judge

Jordan's story

In high school, Jordan realized his addiction to high-potency marijuana when a friend told him, “You're not the Jordan who I became friends with [when you use marijuana].”

As a boarding school student, Jordan chose to vape marijuana to hide it from everyone around him. “Because of the smell, and I had faculty living in the dorm, I couldn't smoke joints. Out of necessity, I had to vape, because I needed to hide it from everyone around me. And I eventually had to hide it from my friends because I was using too much.”

He became addicted to vaping marijuana, using close to 99% THC multiple times a day. He was so addicted that he would use a lighter on empty marijuana cartridges in order to get the last bit of noxious vapor left.

Vaping resulted in a series of respiratory infections and he eventually contracted pneumonia. Two weeks before his 18th birthday, he finally sought help by entering long-term addiction recovery. “If my marijuana use accelerated that quickly, I can't imagine where I would have been if I did not find help.”

By experimenting with the retail sale of industrialized high-potency marijuana for recreational use, you allow an industry to target young users and profit from their increased use. “The legal marijuana industry wants more stories like mine,” concluded Jordan.

Conclusion

Choosing bigger government to regulate the marketing and sale of marijuana, an addictive and harmful drug, for non-medical use would put more Pennsylvania citizens at risk. Science and evidence show that our roads, our schools, and our workplaces would be less safe. It is why so many major medical associations collectively oppose non-medical marijuana legalization. More Pennsylvanians – particularly our young people – would suffer from the many costs of legalizing industrialized, high potency marijuana for retail sale in our local communities.

Truth On Weed is an informational resource found at [TruthOnWeed.com](https://www.truthonweed.com).

⁶³ [Fiscal Impact Study: Marijuana Legalization and New York's Law Enforcement and Emergency Services](#), New York State Sheriff's Association, June 2019.