

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

KEY POINTS:

- Modern marijuana is far more potent, fueling addiction, psychosis, and mental health issues, especially in teens.
- Youth Impact: Legalization has led to more use among kids, with incidents in schools spiking.
- Public Health Crisis: ER visits, poison control calls, and Cannabis Use Disorder cases are rising, often involving children.
- Commercialization: Big tobacco is investing in marijuana, prioritizing profit, drawing comparisons to "Big Tobacco."
- Traffic Dangers: More users are driving high, increasing crashes and fatalities in states experimenting with legalization.
- Expert Opposition: Law enforcement and top health groups in Pennsylvania oppose legalization.
- Black Market Still Thrives: Illegal sales persist despite legalization, straining enforcement.
- Tax Revenue Overstated: Promised income is minimal and outweighed by health and social costs.

Evidence continues to mount that today's industrialized marijuana products are harmful, increasingly addictive, and that legalizing it for recreational use will worsen conditions for Pennsylvania families and communities.

PA Family Council strongly opposes efforts to legalize marijuana for non-medical (recreational) use in Pennsylvania. While making changes to Pennsylvania's current medical marijuana program or reforming aspects of the criminal justice system are worthy discussions, they should be handled separately from any push to commercialize today's highly manufactured marijuana products for non-medical use.

Modern Marijuana: A New, More Dangerous Drug

Today's marijuana is far more potent than in previous decades. The level of THC—the psychoactive component that produces the high—has skyrocketed with modern marijuana. Products like edibles and concentrates now regularly exceed 90% THC. This surge in potency is a driving factor in the widespread use of marijuana, which is now at an all-time high. According to the *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, marijuana use has doubled and daily use has quadrupled over the past two decades.

This increased use of high-potency marijuana correlates with a rise in addiction—especially among youth—as well as growing mental health concerns, including a connection with psychosis, depression, and suicidal ideation. Legalizing the commercial sale of today's powerful marijuana would worsen these issues in Pennsylvania.

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As the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Editorial Board warns, “Scientific studies are increasingly recognizing the risks of cannabis use disorder and the drug’s associations with mental health disorders, at the same time, much higher potency products are becoming available.”

Public Health at Risk

Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD) affects nearly one-third of marijuana users, with the highest rates among younger populations. Pennsylvania-based studies show that in states experimenting with marijuana legalization for recreational use, youth usage has increased, driven by easier access, higher potency, and aggressive marketing.

Large, Big Tobacco-style corporations dominate the marijuana industry in legalized states. In states like Colorado, pot shops now outnumber Starbucks and McDonald’s combined. These businesses heavily market high-potency products in kid-friendly formats, such as fruit-flavored edibles and colorful vape pens.

In Michigan, for example, Detroit’s largest school system saw a troubling spike in student marijuana use following legalization, driven largely by the “proliferation and consumption of marijuana edibles and vape pens.” According to the superintendent, the district has experienced a “distressing escalation in drug-related infractions.”

Public Safety at Risk

States that have legalized recreational marijuana report increases in DUIs, traffic crashes, fatalities, and workplace accidents. As the American Automobile Association (AAA) states, “Emerging research on the effects of liberalizing cannabis use portends negative implications for traffic safety.”

Research shows that up to 1,400 more traffic deaths per year occur in legalized states. For Pennsylvania, that could translate into at least 40 additional fatal crashes and over 1,000 more accidents annually.

Law enforcement organizations—including the Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police and the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association—are firmly opposed to marijuana legalization for recreational purposes, citing serious public health and safety concerns.

The False Promise of Revenue

The argument that marijuana legalization will generate significant tax revenue is misleading. It fails to account for the substantial economic and social costs tied to increased marijuana use and

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commercialization. The Centennial Institute found that for every \$1 in marijuana tax revenue in Colorado, \$4.50 in related social costs were incurred—costs linked to healthcare, traffic safety, addiction treatment, and more.

Dr. Tom Copeland, former director of research at the Centennial Institute, noted:

“For Pennsylvania, any short-term revenue increase will be swallowed up by the serious long-term social and economic effects of legalization.”

An analysis by the advocacy group *More Than 28* found that to meet Gov. Josh Shapiro’s revenue projections, Pennsylvania would need to sell more than 25.5 million eighths of marijuana annually. That would require over 250 million joints consumed each year by the state’s adult population—an unrealistic and troubling scenario.

As PA State Rep. Clint Owlett warns:

“The most likely scenario is a relatively small percentage of the Commonwealth’s population will become daily habitual users, putting their health and lives at risk...The amount of marijuana [Gov. Shapiro] would have to sell to meet his spending demands is significant.”

*“How does adding more drug locations — whether state-run or privately owned, Black-owned or white-owned — help rebuild families shattered by addiction? The color of the business owner doesn’t change the harm the product causes.” - Former PA Superior Court Judge Cheryl Allen, *Marijuana will hurt, not help, vulnerable communities*, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 12/17/24.*

“The legalization of recreational marijuana will take a human toll in Pennsylvania.” - PA State Senator Scott Martin

Legalizing recreational marijuana is a dangerous policy experiment with wide-reaching consequences. Rather than follow the failed paths of other states, Pennsylvania should prioritize strengthening its medical marijuana program and protecting public health, safety, and youth from the damaging effects of commercialized marijuana.

