

December 3, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House, U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As medical and mental health professionals for adolescents and young adults, we write in strong opposition to the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act (H.R. 3884). This bill would remove cannabis entirely as a scheduled drug under the Controlled Substances Act and cause serious harm to the health of young people.

Cannabis use is a growing public health concern across the United States. Recent data from the Monitoring the Future Survey show that the number of young adults aged 19 to 28 who reported cannabis use in the last 30 days increased significantly between 2018 and 2019 to a total of 27 percent. Nearly 10 percent of respondents in this age group reported daily cannabis use. These figures represent the highest level of cannabis use ever reported in young adults in the survey's 34-year history. Data for adolescents from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey show similarly concerning levels of use: 21.7 percent of high school students reported cannabis use in the past 30 days, a slight increase over the prior year. Survey data also show that prior 30-day use among older adults has increased in recent years.

The adverse health effects of cannabis use are well-documented and can negatively impact multiple organ systems, including the heart and lungs. For adolescents and young adults, cannabis use has a detrimental impact on the developing brain, which is not fully developed until the early 20s. Studies examining brain functioning in youth who use cannabis regularly or heavily show potential abnormalities that occur across a number of brain regions including those affecting memory and executive functioning and planning. A major study also has shown that long-term cannabis use initiated in adolescence has negative effects on intellectual function and that the deficits in cognitive areas, such as executive function and processing speed, did not recover by adulthood, even when cannabis use was discontinued. Individuals who use cannabis also face the risk of cannabis use disorder and its attendant sequelae, and cannabis use may also increase the likelihood of developing certain mental health conditions.

Our organizations recognize the negative impact of longstanding racial inequities in the enforcement of drug laws. It is clear that a punitive approach to cannabis use has failed, and the burden of this approach has fallen disproportionately on communities of color. Criminalization of cannabis use has contributed significantly to mass incarceration in communities of color that, in conjunction with countless other systems and practices, drive poorer health outcomes for individuals from these communities. It is critical to advance policies that dismantle systemic racism and advance health equity.

As organizations representing health care professionals, we believe it is important that cannabis use be treated in the medical context as opposed to criminalized. However, wholesale legalization of cannabis at the federal level would be seriously detrimental. Completely legalizing cannabis will allow for its widespread commercialization, which will further increase its use. For decades, the tobacco industry has pursued profits over the health of consumers with a single-minded goal of increasing tobacco use. It is essential that we not allow the development of a commercial cannabis industry destined to follow a similar path.

The outright legalization of the manufacture and sale of cannabis is not in the interest of public health. We urge Congress to instead improve public health investments to decrease cannabis use, ease restrictions on medical research involving cannabis, and address the negative impacts caused by the criminalization of marijuana use. If you have any questions, please contact James Baumberger at [jbaumberger@aap.org](mailto:jbaumberger@aap.org).

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine

cc. The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader  
The Honorable Steve Scalise, Minority Whip  
The Honorable Jerry Nadler, Chairman, House Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Jim Jordan, Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary