



September 9, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise
Republican Whip
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Nadler
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
2141 Rayburn H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee
2056 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker and members of House Leadership in both parties,

We are members of the Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM) Science Advisory Board, co-founded by former Congressman Patrick Kennedy.

We write with concern regarding the reported push to vote on the “MORE” Act, which would fully legalize and commercialize marijuana. This is *not* about decriminalization or rescheduling marijuana. This is **about full, commercial legalization**. We write to emphasize that there is consensus in the scientific community that such a rush to put engineered, high potency marijuana products in the commercial marketplace would put decades of public health progress in jeopardy.

Leading researchers have found:

- The for-profit marijuana industry targets kids, both offline and on social media.
- Marijuana is [addictive](#) and may be a cause of mental illnesses, ranging from [anxiety](#) and [depression](#) to [schizophrenia](#) and [psychosis](#), and even [suicidality](#), even more when initiated in youth.
- Marijuana use, particularly in youth, is associated with subsequent misuse and addiction to other substances. For example, marijuana users are more likely to [misuse prescription opioids](#). Though most who use marijuana won't go on to other drugs, more than 95% of those using heroin and cocaine started with marijuana.
- Marijuana use can severely [impact brain development](#) in youth, leading to lower IQ and to worse mental health, academic, and professional outcomes, even long after discontinuation of marijuana use.

- With for-profit industry marketing, more pregnant women than ever are using marijuana, resulting in [serious negative consequences](#) for newborns.
- Marijuana use can also cause [cardiovascular harm](#), and may lead to [cancer](#).
- Marijuana-related traffic fatalities increased significantly following legalization of recreational marijuana compared to states without commercial recreational marijuana. A study published last month found that widespread legalization could result in nearly [7,000 more traffic deaths](#) annually due to impaired driving.

The “MORE” Act, while well-intended as a potential solution to social injustices, has a host of unintended consequences contained within its text:

- Allowing TV ads, international trafficking without restriction, and a potential takeover by Big Tobacco.
- Offering a massive tax break to marijuana companies.
- Rewarding companies who market flavored THC vapes to teens over social media.
- Removing marijuana from the list of substances tested for safety sensitive positions like truck drivers, airline pilots, and train engineers and allowing military members and those with security clearances to use marijuana.

Racially biased marijuana policing and penalties for low-level possession must be reformed, but legalization and commercialization of the drug will not correct these injustices and will result in further social injustice. The marijuana industry promoting gummies, candies, and high-powered vapes and concentrates containing up to 99% THC actually exploits vulnerable populations. In Denver alone, there is one pot shop for every 43 residents of color in minority neighborhoods, worsening the achievement gap in communities of color. With a rush to a legal commercial market that does not consider the considerable science, greater racial disparities await our nation.

We should not pretend that our policy choices leave us with two extremes – legalization or criminalization. This dichotomy, which pits commercial branding, lobbying, and normalization against an alternative of mass incarceration and a “war on drugs,” is false and unhelpful. Rather, policies can emphasize expungement of past records, treatment diversion, brief interventions, non-criminal penalties, and, of course, prevention and awareness.

Legalization is not social justice—only 2% of the entire industry today has any form of minority ownership. Criminal justice reform can and must proceed. Creating a new addiction-for-profit industry will not aid or speed needed criminal justice reform. This is why decriminalization and expungements are prudent, while commercialization of the next Big Tobacco is not. Communities historically impacted by biased policing through marijuana enforcement require criminal justice reform, not [billionaire-backed pot shops](#).

We urge you not to bring the “MORE” Act to a vote, and not to support this direction for the country.

Sincerely,

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