



January 25, 2021

Dear Virginia House of Representatives and State Senators:

As physicians and Virginia State Directors of the American Academy of Medical Ethics, we strongly agree with the American Medical Association (AMA) and do not support the legalization of marijuana in Virginia.

As public servants elected by Virginia's citizens, you have been entrusted to vote on legislation that will best serve them, their families, and community. Before voting proposed bills into law, you should understand the full implications of passed legislation on a community. If overlooked, the outcomes can be devastating, unintended or irreversible.

Such legislation is before you now at the start of this 2021 legislative session.

There is a severe knowledge gap between popular belief and scientific reality. While the public view of marijuana has become more benign over the last 10 years, the medical and scientific literature tells a much different story, especially for teens and young people. Addiction, dependence, a gateway drug to opioids, mental disease, respiratory condition, motor vehicle accidents, and risky behaviors are just a few of the adverse effects. The AMA, per their 2020 policy document (1) believes that cannabis is a dangerous drug and as such is a serious public health concern; (2) believes "the sale of cannabis for recreational adult use should not be legalized."

We need you to stop marijuana from being legalized in Virginia. As healthcare professionals and advocates for medical ethics, we know NO time is right to legalize marijuana. Consider this:

1. According to Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, setting up the infrastructure to facilitate the legal sale of marijuana would cost Virginia from \$8 million to \$20 million upfront.¹ With nearly 800,000 Virginians filing unemployment in just four months during the pandemic in 2020, this kind of tax spending is irresponsible.²

¹ Key Considerations for Marijuana Legalization (p. 5, Rep.). (2020). VA: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/presentations/Rpt542Pres.pdf>

² COVID-19 IN VIRGINIA: ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT (p. 13, Rep.). (2020). VA: Virginia Economic Development Partnership. https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.goveda.org/resource/resmgr/covid-190/C19_Impact_Briefing_-06-08_V.pdf

2. Since the pandemic's start, Virginia has cut mental healthcare funding, even though mental health issues and substance abuse are expected to rise as the pandemic continues.³ Marijuana is known to make users more susceptible to increased schizophrenia, psychosis, depression, and suicide.⁴
3. Marijuana use can contribute to respiratory complications such as bronchitis, making COVID-19 more dangerous for those who smoke marijuana.⁵
4. Marijuana legalization is known to cause increases in motor vehicle accidents and traffic fatalities, which would extract emergency medical resources away from COVID-19 victims.⁶
5. The socioeconomically disadvantaged were already at an increased risk for psychiatric disorders before the pandemic, and have been the most affected by it.⁷ "Despite that legalization, marijuana usage continues to disproportionately impose serious consequences on racial minorities, while white entrepreneurs and white users enjoy the early fruits of legalization."⁸

The cost of weed is TOO HIGH.

We are asking you to serve all the citizens of Virginia nobly - not just vocal lobbyists.

Thank you,

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³ Magoon, C., MD, Lieberman, J. A., MD, & Rosenberg, L., MSW. (2020, November 16). Preparing for the Mental Health Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved November 17, 2020, from <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/preparing-mental-health-repercussions-covid19-pandemic>

⁴ Avery, J. A. (2020). Marijuana: An honest look at the world's most misunderstood weed. Bristol, Tennessee: Christian Medical & Dental Associations.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Magoon, C., MD, Lieberman, J. A., MD, & Rosenberg, L., MSW. (2020, November 16). Preparing for the Mental Health Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved November 17, 2020, from <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/preparing-mental-health-repercussions-covid19-pandemic>

⁸ Bender, S. W. (1016). The Colors of Cannabis: Race and Marijuana [Review]. UC Davis Law Review, 2. Retrieved November 17, 2020, from https://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/issues/50/2/Topic/50-2_Bender.pdf