

March 18, 2021

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker
New York State Assembly
Albany Office
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: American Medical Association concern about legalization of cannabis for recreational use

Dear Speaker Heastie:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in opposition to the legalization of cannabis for recreational (non-medicinal) use. Specifically, our opposition is due to the uncertainty about the effect of recreational cannabis legalization on public health, as well as the impact of its use particularly in high-risk populations such as youth, pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding. To date, at least 14 states, 3 territories, and the District of Columbia have legalized cannabis for recreational purposes.

Early data from jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis demonstrate concerns particularly around unintentional pediatric exposures resulting in increased calls to poison control centers and emergency department visits, as well as an increase in traffic deaths due to cannabis-related impaired driving. While states have seen an increase in revenue through sales and excise taxes on retail cannabis, the administrative and enforcement costs, as well as the costs to society in terms of public health and safety, should not be minimized.

Due to these concerns, the AMA has encouraged states that have legalized recreational cannabis to allocate a substantial portion of their cannabis tax revenue for public health purposes. These public health purposes include: the misuse of legal and illicit substances; substance misuse prevention and treatment programs for substance use disorders; cannabis-related educational campaigns; scientifically rigorous research on the health effects of cannabis; and public health surveillance efforts. It is not clear, however, how well states are accomplishing public health goals with cannabis-related tax revenue.

The AMA also encourages local, state, and federal public health agencies to improve surveillance efforts to ensure data is available on the short- and long-term health effects of cannabis use. This includes the impact of recreational cannabis legalization on patterns of use by adults, children, and adolescents. This also includes pregnant women; cannabis-related exposures and poisonings; cannabis-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits; cannabis-related treatment admissions; impaired driving and traffic fatalities; criminal activities; and governmental costs and revenue.

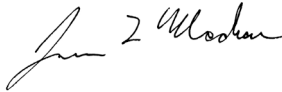
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Our experiences with other legal drugs (i.e., alcohol and tobacco) suggest that for-profit corporations will attempt to weaken regulations intended to protect health in order to maximize profits—resulting in significant public health harms. This, as well as the additional concerns noted above, make it extremely concerning that New York would seek to legalize cannabis when there remain significant public health concerns.

It is for all the reasons set forth above that the AMA is opposed to the legalization of cannabis for recreational use.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Medical Society of the State of New York
Thomas J. Madejski, MD
Willie Underwood, III, MD, MSc, MPH