



## *Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents*

### **Recreational Use of Marijuana Initiative Petition April 2016 Position Statement**

The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) feels strongly that even with firm safeguards in place, expanded access to medical marijuana coupled with the 2008 decriminalization of possession of small amounts of this drug in Massachusetts has increased accessibility for youth and contributed to the growing perception among them that marijuana is safe to consume. As a result, schools across the Commonwealth are grappling with a new reality: students have embraced the notion that the use of marijuana is safe and legal, and therefore, they now demonstrate little regard for school policies.

M.A.S.S. recognizes and respects that the Commonwealth has approved expanded access to medical marijuana for patients in dire need of treatment for conditions where pharmaceutical and conventional interventions have proven either ineffective or too toxic. Registered marijuana dispensaries are heavily regulated and provide limited access to medical grade marijuana solely for qualified patients under the care of a physician. There has been considerable discussion and debate as well as a significant amount of time and resources expended to safely implement a regulatory regime for medical marijuana.

Our membership has expressed a collective concern about the long term impact these existing policies will have on the youth of the Commonwealth. And, while stringent regulation of the fledgling medical marijuana industry in the state is encouraging, there remain many unanswered questions about the effectiveness of this oversight. This is why M.A.S.S. is both disturbed by and unanimous in our opposition to House Bill #3932 - Initiative Petition - The Regulation and Taxation of Marijuana Act. Our membership believes that allowing home cultivation and recreational sales of marijuana throughout the state is reckless, irresponsible and dangerous to both children and adults.

The reasons for such galvanized disapproval of this initiative petition are as varied as they are numerous. Independent scientific studies have credibly demonstrated a frightening correlation between regular marijuana use and severe mental health issues. Even an untrained eye can see differences between the MRI brain images of those who habitually use marijuana and those who don't. Superintendents have seen a significant increase in the numbers of students in school who require extensive social, emotional, behavioral and mental health related interventions. Expanding a child's access to marijuana will only serve to exacerbate and accelerate these problems.

The risk of harmful health consequences and addiction may be greater than in the past due to the high potency of many products on the market today. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) levels in marijuana today can be up to seven times more potent than it was in the 1970's. Higher potency marijuana has been shown to increase the risk of addiction, heighten physical and mental health consequences, and worsen the effects of withdrawal. Statistics show that about one in six users who start using marijuana as teenagers become physically dependent, and that youth marijuana users are more likely than their peers to become addicted to other harmful substances. Plus, children who

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accidentally ingest marijuana, such as edible products that appear similar to ordinary treats, are likely to face serious injury.

Today's modern technology has made ingestion fast, easy and undetectable. Marijuana-infused edibles are the fastest growing segment of the market and present particularly challenging issues for public health and safety. According to data from the National Poison Data System, marijuana exposure has been on the rise among children under six, particularly in states where the drug is legal. High potency edible products are especially dangerous because children could easily consume more marijuana than intended and experience serious adverse effects. In some states where recreational use of marijuana is legal, edible marijuana products constitute almost half of the legal market. Considering that there are more dispensaries in Colorado than there are Starbucks, McDonalds and 7-Elevens combined, a similar situation in Massachusetts would make monitoring of products of this nature in the schoolhouse a significant responsibility and virtually impossible to implement.

Consider this: if the initiative petition were to pass, it would allow an individual to cultivate up to 6 plants for "personal use" with a limit of 12 plants per household at once. With a conservative yield of 5 ounces of consumable marijuana per plant, anyone at anytime could have a household that produces almost 4 pounds of marijuana that is untraceable and easily accessed by children. Such a high volume of untracked and unmonitored cultivation provides excessive and dangerous opportunities for marijuana to be given or sold to kids without consequence. This does not even contemplate unregulated private use of carcinogenic pesticides and other chemicals used in marijuana cultivation and processing.

The negative health and safety impacts of these examples as well as and unfortunate lessons learned from a cavalier approach in other states that have allowed virtually anyone access to a substance that remains an illegal Schedule I substance under Federal law are impossible to ignore. For instance:

- Hospitalizations in Colorado related to marijuana have increased 82 percent since 2008.
- In the year after the drug was legalized in Colorado, marijuana-related emergency room visits increased nearly 30 percent, as did traffic deaths involving marijuana.
- Nearly one in nine users becomes dependent on marijuana and require treatment to overcome this addiction
- Users may suffer from anxiety, depression, mania, and phobias as well as other behavioral health complications.
- Drug-related student suspensions/expulsions increased 32 percent from school years 2008-09 through 2012-13, with the vast majority were for marijuana violations

M.A.S.S. believes that children who regularly use marijuana face serious health and brain development risks and that they are more likely than their peers to become addicted to other harmful substances. We believe that this drug is highly addictive, impairs brain development, negatively affects long-term developmental growth, reduces IQ, memory, and diminishes learning functions. There is ample evidence that marijuana is a gateway drug that may exacerbate the current opioid crisis we currently face. These risks increase the younger the individual and the more intensely that marijuana is consumed. We are strongly united in opposition to House Bill #3932 – Initiative Petition – The Regulation and Taxation of Marijuana Act and urge the voters of Massachusetts to reject this ill-conceived and dangerous effort. A vote in support of this petition would allow irresponsible people to profit at the expense of our children's health, safety and educational success. This cannot happen.