

Submitter: Jennifer Epstein
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1548

To: Sen. Reynolds and Members of the Oregon Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

I am writing to express my strong support for SB1548, a bill that will help protect Oregon's youth and adults from the dangers of cannabis.

As the mom who has lost my 18 year old son to a fake pill made of fentanyl, I was unexpectedly thrown into the drug education world 5 years ago in an effort to save other families from having to experience a loss due to drugs. While my initial focus was on fentanyl and fake pills, I have become educated on the entire drug landscape, from illicit drugs like fentanyl, meth and cocaine to legal drugs such as cannabis, vapes, and alcohol.

The research on cannabis has come a long way in 5 years since I began my drug education/prevention work, and the evidence of the harms cannabis has on youth and young adults can no longer be disputed. Studies show that youth who use cannabis have higher risk for anxiety, depression, psychosis, suicidal ideation. ER doctors are reporting increases in cannabis hyperemesis syndrome. And young cannabis users risk addiction, and are more likely to use other drugs, like opioids. Today's cannabis has been modified to be much more potent and easier to consume (vapes, candies, etc.) than the cannabis of 25 years ago, and many Oregon adults are misguided to believe cannabis is the same "harmless", "natural" recreational drug of their youth. Youth are often influenced by the adults around them, and sadly many believe cannabis use is no big deal. It is time to treat cannabis like the harmful drug that it is.

Cannabis companies are following the same playbook as the tobacco companies of the 1950-70's, and we need to stop the negative impact to our communities. By making cannabis legal with relatively lax laws around the marketing and distribution of this dangerous drug, the public has been incorrectly led to believe that cannabis is a relatively safe drug. The cannabis industry has been allowed to sell product that is more potent than the recommended dose and appealing to youth (including colorful packaging, and sweet products such as candy, soda, cookies, and brownies). I don't know what long-term answer to the cannabis problem is—it is complex and will take years to figure out, but that doesn't mean we cannot take immediate steps to start making changes to protect our community.

The changes proposed in SB1548 are a logical first step toward protecting youth and general public health. Single-serve packaging will make users more aware of the potency of the product they are using, making it less likely they will overuse the product. It will also make the cannabis product a bit harder for toddlers and young kids to access. And adding health warning on the package will help to make consumers aware of the current science around the risks of cannabis use.

Thank you for considering this bill. We need to make sure our laws are based on the current science related to the risks of today's cannabis, not on the love of the cannabis adult Oregonians used in their youth. I believe SB1548 is the first step in that direction.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Epstein
Prevention Advocate