

Dear Mr. Baker,

I am writing to urge the joint committee on cannabis policy to move forward with bills currently under consideration which would limit THC potency, require warning labels on marijuana products, and prohibit flavors and packaging that are attractive to under-age consumers. I am a clinical psychologist and the director of psychological services at the Wellness and Recovery After Psychosis clinic at Boston Medical Center. I am also an assistant professor of psychiatry at Boston University and Harvard Medical School. The views I am voicing in this letter are my own (not necessarily representative of BU, BMC, or HMS).

In these roles, I see many patients who have developed psychosis after using high potency THC products. The average age that my patients begin using THC is 15, and the average age that they develop psychosis is 21. Earlier age of first use, frequent use, and higher THC concentration are well known risk factors for developing psychosis. While some of my patients are "lucky" in that they are able to stop using THC and eventually recover from their psychotic episode, most are not so lucky. For some, the psychosis does not go away even though they stop using marijuana (i.e., the changes in brain function are irreversible). For others, they are addicted to THC and cannot abstain from using, and thus cannot recover from their psychoses. Such histories are typical of a larger and larger proportion of our schizophrenia patients. A growing body of research demonstrates that these individuals are NOT necessarily people who would have developed schizophrenia without using marijuana.

Like alcohol, THC can be enjoyed by adults who use it responsibly. But similar to alcohol, there are serious harms to overuse and use among children. When used by adolescents, THC alters brain development and increases risk for depression and psychosis. I find it baffling that THC is sold legally in gummy, cookie, and other "treat" forms that are inherently attractive to children and adolescents. We have decided as a society that we won't let the alcohol and tobacco industries do that; why should the cannabis industry be exempt from similar regulation?

Potency limits are also an easy target for making marijuana safer. We all know that it is safer to drink a 12 oz can of beer (5% ABV) but that 12 ounces of grain alcohol (95% ABV) can be lethal. High potency THC products are more likely than low potency products to cause serious psychiatric harms.

Right now, the lack of common-sense regulation on cannabis products is a serious threat to the mental health of users. There is plenty of evidence at this point for legislators to enact regulations limiting THC potency, requiring labels warning consumers of the risk of psychosis, and banning the sale of yummy THC treats that will attract underage users. There is a need for more research and data collection to be sure, but you should do more than "recommend further study." I love my job, but I hope you never need to bring anyone in your family to my clinic because they have developed schizophrenia. Enact these policies now to prevent more patients from coming into my care.

Emily Kline, PhD
Boston resident
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