

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act

A recent article in The New York Times discusses the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act (S.4591)- a proposed bill in the United States Congress to recognize legalization of cannabis by the states. The authors are Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senator Cory Booker, and Senator Ron Wyden. This bill would remove marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act altogether, totally legalizing the regulating, taxing, cultivation, production, distribution and sale of marijuana, and completely commercializing a new addictive and harmful substance.

Though states would still be allowed to set their own marijuana laws, businesses and individuals in states that have legalized its use would be free for the first time to sell and consume without the risk of federal punishment. The proposal would also try to make recompense to communities of color and the poor for damage from years of restrictive federal drug policy. It calls for immediately expunging nonviolent marijuana-related arrests and convictions from federal records and would earmark new tax revenue for restorative justice programs intended for communities affected by the federal prohibition of cannabis.

The legislation faces the Senate, where Republicans are opposed, and it is unlikely to become law soon. President Biden has not endorsed it, and some moderate Democrats are likely to balk at the implications of decriminalizing a drug that has been policed and stigmatized.

The Democrats' bill proposes empowering the Food and Drug Administration and the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau at the Treasury Department to begin regulating the production, distribution and sale of marijuana. Among other implications, the changes would allow marijuana companies already operating in states where it is legal to gain full access to the United States banking system and claim federal tax deductions for business expenses.

The legislation would gradually institute a federal excise tax similar to alcohol and tobacco sales, eventually as high as 25 percent for big businesses, allowing the federal government to benefit from sales that came close to \$20 billion in 2020. The revenue would then be allocated back to communities most affected by federal drug policy and to fund expanded medical research into cannabis that is currently limited by its status as a controlled substance.

One provision, for instance, would establish a cannabis justice office at the Justice Department to help fund job training, legal aid and help with re-entry after incarceration. Another program would promote loans to small cannabis businesses owned by members of racially or economically marginalized groups.

The bill would aim to make other, more direct attempts to compensate for the effects of years of aggressive policing. In addition to expunging past arrests and convictions, it would entitle those who are currently serving sentences for nonviolent federal drug crime to a court hearing to reconsider their sentences. The federal government would no longer be able to discriminate against marijuana users seeking federal housing, food or health benefits.

The CAO does not contain any public health guardrails, such as potency caps, packaging and labeling requirements, health warnings, or restrictions on advertising and marketing to youth nor does it prohibit making misleading claims about these products. Research points to the negative consequences of marijuana use to one's health.

According to the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), research on marijuana shows that the brain develops until the age of 21 and therefore is more sensitive than the mature brain to environmental influences. Adults who smoked cannabis regularly during adolescence demonstrated the following long-term effects on the Brain: Impaired connections between neurons in specific brain areas; Impaired Precuneus- part of the brain that involves integration of information; Compromised alertness and self-conscious awareness; Impaired area of hippocampus involved in learning and memory; Compromised prefrontal areas involved in executive functioning; Compromised subcortical networks that process habits and routines. Additionally, brain imaging studies have shown decreased activity in prefrontal areas and reduced volume in the hippocampus. The consequences of these effects include difficulty with attention, memory deficits, encoding deficits (flow of information throughout the brain), consolidation deficits (converting short term memories in to long term) and difficulties with complex tasks such as problem solving, mental flexibility (shifting to thought patterns to respond to given situations) and integrating information.

Marijuana is contraindicated for fetal and adolescent brain development and is linked to attention, memory, motivation and learning problems in youth. Marijuana use is also linked to negative health and societal outcomes, such as increased workplace injuries, increased fatal car accidents, physical ailments, and serious mental health issues. Modern high-potency marijuana products can contain up to 99.9% tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). As the United States continues to deal with the unprecedented opioid, and stimulant epidemics, legalizing and commercializing marijuana would only exacerbate these issues.

The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) is a State agency whose mission is to improve the lives of all New Yorkers by leading a comprehensive premier system of addiction services for prevention, treatment, and recovery. For more information about OASAS please visit <https://www.ny.gov/agencies/office-addiction-services-and-supports>.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is concerned about marijuana use and its consequences on the health and development of youth. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on

www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about marijuana use at www.safeglencove.org.