

CONTACT INFORMATION:

STEPS Coalition

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On behalf of the [STEPS Coalition](#), we would like to submit a statement for consideration during the public hearing for the recreational sale of cannabis in Southington on 8/17/2021. As the youth substance misuse prevention coalition, STEPS does not support the sale of recreation cannabis in our Town, as it has the potential to be harmful to our youth by increasing access to cannabis while decreasing youth perception of harm of the substance. **\*In year 1 of administering the Search Institute's Attitudes & Behaviors survey to Southington students in grades 7, 9 & 11, overall, 83% of Southington students found Marijuana use risky, as compared to 2020 when only 68% of Southington students found Marijuana use risky.**

Below are bulleted points that should be shared community-wide, as it not only supports that easier access to cannabis by youth is dangerous, but that any substance under the age of 25 is detrimental to the developing brain. ***STEPS is committed to Southington youth by supporting the idea that no substances should be introduced during the critical period of brain development.***

- From the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry \(AACAP\)](#), "Marijuana-related policy changes, including legalization, may have significant unintended consequences for children and adolescents. Marijuana legalization can be associated with (a) decreased adolescent perception of marijuana's harmful effects, (b) increased marijuana use among parents and caretakers, and (c) increased adolescent access to marijuana, all of which reliably predict increased rates of adolescent marijuana use and associated problems.
  - "Epidemiological studies show that areas with permissive legal cannabis climates are associated with greater individual risk factors for CUD. This includes: (1) higher rates of edible consumption and vaping, (2) higher delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) potency and lower cannabidiol (CBD) levels, and, (3) younger age of initiation of us," (AACAP).
  - "Teenage marijuana use is at its highest level in 30 years, and today's teens are more likely to use marijuana than tobacco," (AACAP).
- In Colorado, there was a 26 percent increase in youth (ages 12 to 17) monthly cannabis use in the three years after medical cannabis was commercialized (2009) compared to the three years prior to commercialization, according to ["The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact"](#).
- The amount of THC in cannabis has increased over the past few decades. In the early 1990s, the average THC content in marijuana was less than 4 percent. It is now about 15 percent and much higher in some products such as oils and other extracts" ... ***The effects of marijuana in adolescents may be greater than what adults initially perceive based on their own experience. There are now reports of high concentrates of Marijuana causing signs of psychosis and schizophrenia.***
- Marijuana alters neural connections in the brain to reinforce a pleasurable effect, while impairing cognitive functions such as memory and decision-making. ([NIDA](#))

- Early marijuana use impairs brain function and predisposes youth to substance abuse disorders later in life.
- **SOUTHINGTON SPECIFIC DATA:** Our research has shown that perception of harm is a potential indicator of marijuana use and that a reduction of perceived harm is commonly associated with an increase in marijuana use:
  - Past 30 Day Use (DECREASING):
    - 7th Graders: 0%
    - 9th Graders: 5.5%
    - 11th Graders: 14.4%
  - Perception of Risk (DECREASING):
    - 7th Graders: 83%
    - 9th Graders: 68%
    - 11th Graders: 52%
      - **\*In year 1 of the survey, overall, 83% of Southington students found Marijuana risky, as compared to 2020 when it was only 68% of Southington students found Marijuana use risky**
  - Sources of Marijuana (from those who said they have smoked it; all grades combined)
    - *Includes "Sometimes and Often" responses; excludes "Never"*
    - Friend or Relative: 21.7%
    - Friend / Peer Gave to Me: 75.8%
    - Friend / Peer Sold to Me: 46.4%
    - Bought From Someone in Southington: 33.1%
    - Bought From Someone Outside Southington: 31.4%
  - Among 11<sup>th</sup> graders that reported vaping marijuana, 62 % reported vaping cannabis 1-2 times per week and 39% reported vaping cannabis daily.

Please follow these links for further information on the impact of marijuana legalization on youth:

[YOUTH MARIJUANA USE](#) from [Smart Approaches to Marijuana](#)

[Lessons Learned from State Marijuana Legalization](#)

[THE COLORADO REPORT](#)

STEPS will continue its work making substance misuse prevention a priority in the Southington community while using data to advocate for what is best for the youth in our Town.

Respectfully yours,



Mark Pooler  
STEPS President

*Megan Albanese*

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Youth Prevention Coordinator

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