

Chippewa Valley Schools organization campaigns against pot advocacy in Michigan

The Macomb Daily



Josh Hovey is the spokesperson for the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol. The Michigan Board of Canvassers in May approved the form of the group's petition to legalize marijuana in Michigan, and the group is now collecting signatures to place the issue on the November 2018 ballot. Photo courtesy of JOSH HOVEY

By Nicole Tuttle , For The Macomb Daily

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Dr. Charlene McGunn, the executive director for the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families, said that legalization of marijuana will increase youth use. Nicole Tuttle — For the Macomb Daily

Campaigning against marijuana use is nothing new for the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families, as the group focuses on preventing and reducing youth substance use through a series of programs and initiatives. Their efforts, however, will face a greater test as 2018 approaches and the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol forges ahead for a new marijuana-related ballot issue.

The Michigan Board of Canvassers approved a petition for a marijuana-related state ballot initiative brought by the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol in May. The group now has 180 days to collect over 250,000 valid signatures in order to place the issue on the November 2018 ballot.

Although Michigan voters have already approved legalizing medical marijuana, according to the group's website the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol's petition for November 2018 goes a step further by requesting voters to approve:

- Legalization of personal possession, cultivation and use of marijuana for adults 21 and over;
- Legalization of the cultivation of industrial hemp;

- Licensing marijuana businesses that cultivate, process, test, transport and sell marijuana;
- Begin testing and safety regulations for retail marijuana;
- Tax marijuana at 10 percent in excise taxes and six percent in sales taxes, to support K-12 public schools, roads and local government.

Josh Hovey, the spokesperson for the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol, said the signature collection process began shortly after the approval of the ballot language by the board of canvassers.

“We’re not disclosing our total signatures collected at the moment, but I can say that we are ahead of schedule and that we have more and more people reaching out every day asking how they can help with the petition collection effort,” Hovey said.

Both professional signature collectors and volunteers are seeking signatures statewide, according to Hovey.

“Our stance is to educate on the issues,” Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families Executive Director Dr. Charlene McGunn said. “We do believe that when people understand that any legalization increases youth use, that it gives pause to think. We don’t think that people really understand the issues related to marijuana and that is why there has been a shift in public opinion and that reflects that confusion.”

McGunn added the potential ballot proposal would not regulate marijuana in the same way alcohol is regulated.

“Alcohol is carefully regulated in states, it has a tiered system of regulation. That is not what is included in the proposal,” McGunn said.

Setting the age limit at 21 will not necessarily prevent those under 21 from obtaining marijuana, as a drinking age has not prevented alcohol use by younger people, she pointed out. McGunn said studies have indicated that marijuana can affect the developing brain and that the brain develops into the 20s.

Studies have also shown that in Colorado, since the legalization of recreational marijuana, there has been an increase in school dropouts, as well as a spike in fatal traffic crashes related to marijuana.

“Students who use alcohol or marijuana or other drugs, their grades are lower. There is no surprise there given marijuana’s effect on memory and acquisition of learning,” McGunn said. “The science is extensive on the issues...”

Hovey said that prohibition of marijuana is not effective.

“Ignoring the problem of teen use isn’t working. The only way to make sure we keep marijuana out of the hands of our youth is by putting smart regulations in place, which is exactly what our initiative is designed to do. We are going to move marijuana off of the streets and into a regulated system where it is behind a counter and IDs are required for anyone purchasing it,” Hovey said.

Hovey added driving under the influence would remain illegal if the initiative passed.

“The traffic data on states like Colorado at this point is inconclusive because, unlike alcohol, there are not impairment tests that exist for marijuana since inactive traces of it remain in the system for several days,” Hovey said.

McGunn added marijuana is an addictive drug and more potent today than a few decades ago, particularly in edibles. Hovey disputed that potency is related to addiction.

“If you think about it, any revenue that occurs from legalizing any substance, look at alcohol and tobacco and consider the social costs. The lack of productivity. It is difficult for some businesses now to find workers that can pass drug tests,” McGunn said.

Hovey added the group’s initiative creates strict licensing guidelines similar to legislation that has already been passed to regulate medical marijuana.

“Marijuana is a far safer substance than alcohol. And just like with alcohol, marijuana prohibition has been a massive failure that each year results in thousands of unnecessary arrests and wastes taxpayer dollars and law enforcement resources,” Hovey said.

McGunn also questioned the revenue that would be generated with marijuana legalization under the proposed ballot question, indicating that in Colorado the revenue generated is less than one percent of the state’s general fund revenue.

“It is very interesting to propose funding schools with money from drugs,” McGunn said.

Hovey added Colorado raised \$200 million from marijuana sales last year.

“We estimate our initiative will generate hundreds of millions of dollars every year in new tax revenue for our schools, roads and local governments,” Hovey said.