

# Passage of Proposal 1 presents challenges for Chippewa Valley coalition

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — On Nov. 6, Michigan residents passed Proposal 1 by a vote of 56 percent to 44 percent to make recreational marijuana legal.

The proposal asked residents to authorize and legalize possession, use and cultivation of marijuana products by individuals who are at least 21 years of age and older. It allows individuals to grow up to 12 marijuana plants for personal consumption and impose a 10-ounce limit for marijuana kept at residences.

One group that is concerned with how the proposal will affect students is the Chippewa Valley Schools Coalition for Youth and Families.

Members of the anti-marijuana group recently addressed its perspective on the issue and its plans for the future.

“Now that the proposal has passed, it presents many challenges,” Chippewa Valley High School counselor Dan Lawrence said. “The medical marijuana law in 2008 started the challenge for us in messaging to young people in terms of what potential harm could be caused by use, especially in young people.”

Lawrence said the passing has made it more difficult because “the perceived risk of this drug has taken another step below the threshold of risk. I think a lot of young people are confused about what this drug means in their lives.”

Dr. Charlene McGunn, the coalition’s executive director, said, “The advent of recreational marijuana is going to send a terrible message to kids. It’s going to further send the message that marijuana is safe. The age of 21 means nothing. What it’s going to do is infuse marijuana into communities.”

One concern that Lawrence has with the passing is the way marijuana is packaged.

“A lot of edibles that are created with THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) are in candies and granola bars where a young person doesn’t have that barrier to attempting it,” he said. “Alcohol doesn’t taste good, so the taste may not appeal to a young person, but these candies do.”

“The passage of Proposal 1 will make marijuana more accessible in the community,” said Stephanie Lange, a student assistant specialist at Dakota High School.

Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts added that “this will impact our kids.”

“This proposal was sold as increased tax revenue and you can fix all the potholes and the roads. There’s no money in there for treatment for kids,” Roberts said. “Parents, elected officials and people in power haven’t connected the dots to see that every action has a reaction. They assume this is a rational adult decision of whether or not adults will partake in this.”

When asked what the coalition's efforts were prior the election, McGunn said, "About five years ago, we created Mobilizing Michigan. It's a multi-component campaign. Our focus has been on educating parents and the community on issues related to youth and marijuana because of the consequences for kids. In advance of Proposal 1, we've been working to educate the community."

The National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence state that the younger that marijuana use begins, the higher the potential for addiction. One in six teens who use marijuana become addicted, the study states, and each year more teens enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana addiction than for all other illegal drugs combined.

The coalition's plans for the future include updating its Mobilizing Michigan toolkit with information, continuing marijuana prevention education in elementary schools, and possibly hosting a county summit in January to discuss how to protect children from recreational marijuana.

"I think adults have a responsibility to protect youth and to create conditions for them to do well," Roberts said. "It's disheartening to see adults not pay attention to children. I'm really concerned about dispensaries in our neighborhoods. That's not acceptable for our kids."

As far as educating students within the district about marijuana, Lange said it has always been a part of the health curriculum.

"Students would receive this information in middle school health class in a 10-week program," Lange said. "In high school, there is a semester-long class that is a graduation requirement."

The Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families joins schools, families and communities in a partnership to prevent and reduce youth substance use and its negative consequences.

The coalition serves the geographic area of Chippewa Valley Schools and includes parts of Clinton and Macomb townships. It consists of 90 adult members and 150 youth members.

Lawrence said that as a counselor and working with students one-on-one, he'll have discussions about marijuana and, "It's a lot for me to clear up misconceptions about potential harm. The message students are getting is the message that is geared toward adults. And I don't see a lot of discussion about messaging for young people."

The bottom line for Lawrence is that "the brain doesn't stop developing until you are 25. Even though it might be perceived as a harmless drug for adults, it definitely isn't harmless for young people, mainly because of brain development."

Michigan is now the 10th state in the nation and the first in the Midwest to legalize marijuana for recreational use, joining California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Colorado, Nevada, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine and Washington, D.C.

In Macomb County, Proposal 1 passed with over 35,000 more "yes" votes cast, or 55 percent of the vote.