

Chair Lively and members of the committee,

My name is Ellen Velez. I live in Northeast Portland and work in youth substance use prevention in Clackamas County. Today, I write in opposition of House Bill 2233.

The public consumption of marijuana is highly concerning to me for a variety of reasons, ranging from the health and safety of Oregonians to increased youth access and societal norms.

For decades now, Oregon has spent millions of dollars fighting to combat the health repercussions of tobacco use. Although the marijuana industry argues that weed is safe, the truth is, we don't know enough about it yet and lack research and evidence on its long-term impacts. **We do know however that when smoked or vaped, marijuana has many of the same chemicals and carcinogens as cigarettes.** This is also true for the second-hand smoke that's released into the air- impacting anyone nearby.

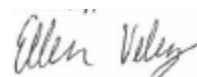
My main concern though, is not adults and those who choose to use marijuana. My concern is the youth in Oregon. I am new to this state and utterly amazed at how common and normal it is for youth to engage in smoking. Upon moving here, I quickly realized how socially acceptable it is for young teenagers to smoke. Out of curiosity, I looked into it further. Oregon consistently ranks as one of the high states in youth marijuana consumption. According to the Student Wellness Survey, the perception of harm from marijuana has significantly decreased over the last decade and especially since legalization. This perception further leads to youth using marijuana at younger ages and higher frequency. Allowing for public consumption, cafes and licenses at special events, we would be further allowing our children to believe that marijuana is safe and ok to use. Marijuana can severely impact the developing brain and lead to emotional and cognitive issues well into adulthood. Additionally, when youth consume marijuana at younger ages, they're much more likely to become addicted and misuse other substances later in life.

This bill raises another concern, traffic safety. With increased consumption outside of homes, it's likely that people will drive under the influence after leaving a "café". Not only does it take marijuana a lot longer to run its course compared to drinking alcohol, but we don't yet have any effective assessments for law enforcement to evaluate if someone is driving under the influence. In Oregon, Colorado and Washington, car accident rates increased significantly after recreational marijuana was legalized. I would only expect these rates to further increase with increased public consumption.

For these reasons, I'm particularly concerned with the state of Oregon becoming the first in the country to pass such a bill. While cities in California and Colorado are experimenting with such legislation and collecting data on its impacts, Oregon might rush ahead to later fight years repairing the damage this bill creates within our great and beautiful state.

I argue that before we make marijuana more publicly accessible, we need to collect more data and put restrictions in place that will further protect and support our youth. They are the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Ellen Velez, VFC Prevention & Policy Coordinator