



Shapiro's Pot Friendly Budget Puts Cash over Kids' Health

Posted to [Politics](#) February 21, 2025 by [Stephen Gambescia](#)

Stephen F. Gambescia, of Havertown, teaches public health policy at Drexel University. Sfg23@drexel.edu He wrote this for InsideSources.com.

Gov. Josh Shapiro's pre-election concern for legalizing cannabis has now turned into a need to balance his wish-list budget through a consumer tax if recreational marijuana becomes legal in Pennsylvania. This should be an affront to parents and those interested in working for a healthy Pennsylvania. Now that he has [spent time studying the issue](#), he ostensibly feels enlightened and suggests that those who oppose legalizing this harmful substance are kidding themselves.

However, the governor is mistaken in thinking that legalizing cannabis will eliminate the "shadow market" or that this new enterprise will be run by upstanding entrepreneurs and investors who will adhere to the rules and regulations designed to keep cannabis out of the hands of our youth.

Expecting this nascent industry to act responsibly in controlling minors' access to these products is naïve. We have decades of experience showing that youth are drawn to forbidden fruits such as tobacco, alcohol, and now vaping. Public health and school systems' educators have proven to be no match for the marketing tactics employed by these enterprises.

While the rules for marketing this knowingly hazardous consumer product are well-intended and well-written, the governor underestimates the challenges state agencies will face. They simply do not have the time, talent, or inclination to manage this substance effectively. This is not what they were established to do. Strategies aimed at controlling youth access to marijuana will likely follow the same struggling strategies used to thwart historical risky teenage behavior.

If cannabis is officially considered a controlled substance and states recognize its medicinal potential, a reasonable and responsible solution would be to sell it

through pharmacies. Creating a redundant cottage industry solely for the benefit of the state and investors prioritizes profit over the health of our youth.

We have already seen the results of the experiment in selling medical marijuana. For example, one medical marijuana dispensary in Pennsylvania is named [“CURE,”](#) while another is called [“Curaleaf.”](#) A dispensary setting up in Philadelphia is branded [“Restore,”](#) with the tagline “Dispensing Happiness” in its print ads; another is called [“Beyond Hello.”](#) The examples continue, with names that give the impression, at a minimum, of suggesting “Don’t worry, be happy,” and “Have we got the elixir for what ails you!”

The fact remains that cannabis is classified by federal agencies as a [Schedule I substance](#), indicating a high potential for abuse and no accepted medicinal value, warranting its treatment as a controlled substance. Furthermore, while the former administration [pressured the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration](#) to downgrade cannabis’s risk, President Donald Trump has decided to leave that determination to scientists.

It will be a tough battle to prevent legislation from reaching the governor’s desk that would unleash the incubus surrounding this “evil weed.” For decades, pro-cannabis advocates have portrayed those concerned about legalization as puritanical or as apologists for the nanny state.

Additionally, it is likely that enough Republicans may acquiesce to join nearly all Democrats in legalizing cannabis, especially as it has become uncool to oppose pot today. The allure of easy revenue generated by consumer taxes is hard to resist for the General Assembly.

The governor and legislators should continue their due diligence on this issue, regardless of what neighboring states have done. In layman’s terms, [The Atlantic](#) has published an investigative piece detailing that the promised benefits of legalizing pot have not materialized in the states that have implemented it.

Reports are readily available indicating that today’s marijuana, which teens experiment with, is [far more potent than in the past](#). Supporters of legalization rationalize that not enough is known about the deleterious effects of cannabis consumption due to the tight federal control that has hindered thorough research.

Not only is there ample research showing serious concerns regarding both short and long-term cannabis use, but health reports continue to accumulate,

revealing [that consuming cannabis poses health problems from head to toe](#). And these health researchers are not kidding.

Author



• [Stephen Gambescia](#)

Stephen F. Gambescia, of Havertown, teaches public health policy at Drexel University. Sfg23@drexel.edu He wrote this for InsideSources.com.

[View all posts](#)