

Marin Voice: Sausalito must not sidestep process for retail cannabis storefronts

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Growing up in Marin, I've had the privilege of witnessing and experiencing the passion, dedication, and perseverance of our community members when supporting an issue, as well as the extreme resistance opposing parties exert.

Right now, the issue of cannabis commercialization, normalization and misinformation is big in Marin County. The last thing we need is a rushed decision on marijuana storefronts in Sausalito.

I feel that in just the last seven years, as I went from sixth grade to graduating from high school, the impact of cannabis has spread like the wildfires devastating our state. It seems like young people no longer consider marijuana to be as harmful. To some extent, this is a positive shift in perspective. However, from my personal experience (and local data), I know it has led to more kids trying, liking, and becoming dependent on the drug.

To be clear, I strongly support the legalization of marijuana. Studies have shown its health risks are far less than alcohol and it has scientifically proven benefits. That said, the undeniable elephant in the room is the real impact on youth – which I've seen firsthand.

My peers, friends and family members are using cannabis more often primarily due to the industry's profit-seeking push and our community's buy-in. During high school, I observed students talking about using pot as though it was a self-prescribed antidepressant. It seemed like they smoked weed to self-medicate feelings of stress, anxiety, frustration or any other normal emotion.

It didn't matter if participating in sports or other activities could help them achieve the same effect, weed was "cooler" and "easier" to use – less effort for the "same" reward.

Of course, that couldn't be less accurate. Kids ended up using weed to cope with more and more of their adolescent issues. Heartbreak, anger and sleeplessness all had the same solution: Get high. It's not only the science, clearly showing that this short term solution has serious negative impacts on the still-developing adolescent brain, but also the innumerable missed opportunities and memories that lead to the definitive conclusion that young people should not be using weed on a regular basis.

Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 worsened the mental health concerns among young people nationwide, likely contributing to a high youth suicide rate in Marin. Many grasped onto marijuana.

Understandably, healthy coping skills were temporarily thrown out the window. Yet, as pandemic restrictions ease, people are reluctant to lose their crutch.

Proposition 64 legalizing cannabis was designed in a way that gives local control over marijuana businesses. Sausalito leaders should put a stop to the push to create a ballot measure on the November ballot that would rush the process and create a legal monopoly for a segment of the cannabis corporate machine.

This initiative appears to be led by industry forces. This is what failed representative democracy looks like. The corporate cannabis business is sidestepping the public process — which would have included community education, town hall forums and a best-practices approach.

This is not an issue about whether or not smoking weed is good or bad, or if people should be allowed to do so. There will always be access to legal weed. The issue is about the youth who would potentially see a cannabis retail shop filled with flavored high potency products. Consciously or subconsciously, they may perceive the drug as less harmful.

As an 18-year-old, I've seen too many students in our community negatively impacted by marijuana. I am pleading with you and every other reader to consider my lived experiences and the youth perspective before dismissing any information that may be contrary to your previously held beliefs.

Research the science. Talk to youth. Try to understand the environment local students are navigating. I am writing because I care about this topic. My views are my own, not dictated by any organization or adults.

I know I speak for countless of my peers who feel similarly but don't want to, or are not able to, speak out.

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