

NAMI Ramsey County
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Sept 10, 2024

Re: Mental Health Considerations re: Cannabis Regulation in St Paul

Dear Mayor Carter and Members of the St Paul City Council:

NAMI Ramsey County is a regional, grassroots nonprofit that supports, educates and advocates for those in our community who live with a mental illness as well as their families and friends. We are a proud affiliate of NAMI MN and National NAMI. True to the roots of NAMI, founded by four moms in Madison, WI in the late 1970's, our affiliate focuses on serious mental illnesses (SMI)—incurable brain illnesses such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder. While meaningful recovery is possible, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that less than 2/3 with SMI receive any treatment.

Pursuant to the 2023 legalization of adult-use cannabis by the Minnesota State Legislature, St. Paul and other local jurisdictions across our county and state have been given local control to create certain restrictions and regulations to benefit our community. As the St Paul City Council now considers zoning requirements for cannabis retail businesses and, in the future, sets hours of operation, establishes density for retail operations, determines uses for its share of tax revenues as well as other decisions, it's critically important to make choices for our communities that take into account the serious mental health impacts of cannabis use.

Here are important facts that have not as yet been identified as part of the Planning Commission's recommendations or in testimony provided thus far:

Cannabis can impact mental health, including producing symptoms of depression, anxiety, paranoia and psychosis. Research shows that cannabis use significantly increases the risk of developing a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia. This risk is especially high during adolescence and into the mid-twenties, beyond the minimum legal age for adult-use, as the brain continues to develop. High potency and daily use also increases the risk. As many as half the people with cannabis-induced psychosis may go on to develop schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. (NAMI MN, National Academy of Science)

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Our current mental health system is inadequate, under-resourced and ill-equipped to treat a surge in serious mental illnesses. Please review the recent MDH study on unacceptable and costly backlogs in hospital transfers and discharges for behavioral health patients in Minnesota. Across the US and here in our own communities, it's deplorable that for all too many living with chronic psychiatric disorders, jails, prisons and the street have replaced the asylums that were closed fifty ago with the promise of a comprehensive, community-based system that has never been funded.

Cannabis tax revenue fails to address the health harms it is predicted to cause. According to the Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance, "Schizophrenia already costs the US more than \$280 billion per year. The increased incidence of schizophrenia, earlier onset of the disease and higher rates of relapse due to cannabis use contribute to increased costs for healthcare, education, employment, family expenses, criminal justice system involvement, homelessness and supported housing initiatives."

In view of the addictive character of cannabis; its health and mental health harms, particularly for children, young people and pregnant women; and its social and economic costs, we call on you to optimize protective buffers around schools, daycares, public park facilities and residential treatment facilities while also preventing an inequitable distribution of cannabis retailers across the city, leading to patterns of concentration by or within neighborhoods, by appropriately utilizing, **for purposes of public health and community well-being**, the broad scope of local controls available under state law, such as buffers between cannabis retailers. A useful reference is "A Guide for Local Governments on Adult-Use Cannabis," MDH Office of Cannabis Management, updated Aug 2024.

We know that as our elected leaders, as parents and as our neighbors, you care deeply about St Paul residents and neighborhoods including our children, young adults and families. Please factor this key information into the important decisions you are making for the future of our city and the health of our communities.

Thank you for considering our testimony and do not hesitate to contact us. Our members can speak to the risks of cannabis use and its link to treatment-resistant psychosis based on heartbreaking family experience and evidence from leading health and mental health authorities.

Respectfully Submitted,

NAMI Ramsey County Board