

What Will Happen If Legalized Medical Marijuana Spreads in Florida and Other States.

Voters in Florida, and other states as well, are being asked to approve medical marijuana. If passed, what will the impact be on youth people? NOPE asked an expert to explain.



This November, voters in Florida will once again decide on whether to create an amendment to the state's constitution to legalize medical marijuana in the Sunshine State.

NOPE Task Force asked Amy Ronshausen, Deputy Director of [Drug Free America Foundation, Inc.](#) to explain the impact of marijuana on young people and what could happen if the amendment passes in Florida. She also discussed what concerned citizens can do to prevent the amendment from passing.

Ronshausen says Florida could face the same consequences of legalized medical marijuana as Colorado and other states: "Duped by a multi-million-dollar campaign, voters agreed to the creation of a commercialized marijuana industry -- way beyond what is allowed in Amsterdam. The same type of marijuana industry is being proposed in Florida where the Department of Health has predicted that the state can expect approximately 2,000 pot shops to spring up across the state if the proposed ballot initiative passes."

Why do you feel it's important to prevent medical marijuana from being legalized, especially as it relates to youth?

Amy Ronshausen: Science and tons of research have identified marijuana as a harmful substance. We know marijuana is addictive and potentially becoming even more so as THC potency levels rise. We know marijuana is toxic and contributes to a variety of illnesses including: birth defects, respiratory damage, cancer, strokes, brain damage, infertility and the escalation of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia.

For youth, research studies demonstrate that regular use can affect IQ rates and result in cognitive dysfunctions that continue into adulthood. With legalization, the marijuana industry becomes a big business that actively markets and advertises their products and, like tobacco, they market to youth hoping to capture lifelong customers.

Legalization will increase use rates and availability. The legalization of marijuana would result in the normalization of it and a perception that it is socially acceptable and not harmful. It would also allow the development of a well-funded Big Marijuana lobby that could be very effective in advocating for the legalization of other drugs.

What is being done to stop medical marijuana legalization in Florida and other states?

Amy Ronshausen: In Florida, the coalition partners of Don't Let Florida Go to Pot have continued their grassroots campaign to educate on the harms of marijuana use and the impacts of legalization in states like Colorado and Washington. This education is happening at the all levels, from business leader and lawmakers to stay-at-home parents and young adults. Similar movements are happening in other states and at the federal level. Drug policy organizations and prevention coalitions are united in protecting our nation's youth and pushing back against the normalization of marijuana use.

What can concerned citizens do to prevent medical marijuana from being legalized?

Amy Ronshausen: It is important to read the legislation or ballot measures and understand what the wording will allow. In Colorado, many voters thought they were voting to keep people in possession of a joint out of jail. In reality, the ballot measure legalized the possession, cultivation, distribution and retail sale of marijuana. Duped by a multi-million-dollar campaign, voters agreed to the creation of a commercialized marijuana industry -- way beyond what is allowed in Amsterdam. The same type of marijuana industry is being proposed in Florida where the Department of Health has predicted that the state can expect approximately 2,000 pot shops to spring up across the state if the proposed ballot initiative passes.

Citizens should look out for loopholes in the amendment's language, be informed voters and educate others on the harms of marijuana legalization. They should also express their concerns to their members of the legislature since the state is under threat to legalize marijuana through state legislation as well as through a constitutional ballot initiative.

Some of the most powerful change comes from grassroots advocacy. The public health and safety of our communities depend on citizens who care enough to speak up.

About Amy Ronshausen: She is the Deputy Director of both Drug Free America Foundation, Inc. and Save Our Society From Drugs (S.O.S.), national nonprofit organizations that works to defeat drug legalization attempts, promote sound drug policies, and prevent drug use, abuse and addiction. Mrs. Ronshausen also serves the Executive Director for the Florida Coalition Alliance, representing over 30 community anti-drug coalitions.

Previously Mrs. Ronshausen worked for Operation PAR, starting off as a call specialist in their access center and then working as a juvenile certified GAIN assessor. Mrs. Ronshausen also worked as a juvenile counselor for PAR's Adolescent Recovery Intervention Services and the Juvenile Enhancement Treatment Services, trained in Motivational Enhancement and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Prior to coming to S.O.S., Mrs. Ronshausen spent three years as a program specialist with Pinellas County Adult Drug Court, working under four judges. While in drug court, Mrs. Ronshausen linked defendants with treatment providers and monitored their progress through

the criminal justice system. In 2007 Mrs. Ronshausen was awarded Best Team Practices for her work in Adult Drug Court.