



**MEDIA ADVISORY  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Advocate for Children and Youth Urges Government to Ensure Children and Youth are Protected under Bill C-45**

SASKATOON – The Advocate for Children and Youth, Corey O'Soup, urges the Federal Government to consider amendments to Bill C-45 to ensure the protection of children and youth from the potential harms of legalized cannabis.

“As the Advocate for Children and Youth in this province, it is my duty to ensure the government is acting in the best interest of our young people. I do not believe that Bill C-45 protects children and youth from the risks associated with legalizing cannabis and certain changes must be made,” says O'Soup.

According to Health Canada, the brain continues to develop until the age of 25 and the use of cannabis on a young person's brain can have serious effects ranging from increased risk of suicide, depression, anxiety disorder and long-term effects related to memory, concentration, intelligence and the ability to think and make decisions. O'Soup cautions “that the use of cannabis in adolescence can cause irreparable damage to their developing brains and we cannot ignore this.”

Setting quantity and potency limits of cannabis to those under the age of 25 is crucial to the mental health and well-being of our youth, especially to those youth with predispositions to mental health disorders. “These are serious risks and the magnitude of the mental health and suicide crisis we are already facing needs to be addressed proactively. Our youth are the future and we need to strive to help them reach their full potential by paving the way for them,” says O'Soup.

As Canada prepares to decriminalize cannabis, and as the province is developing regulations in response to Bill C-45, the Advocate strongly recommends the province considers the impact that this will have on the children and youth in Saskatchewan and has made the attached recommendations to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being, and voice of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy, programs and practice.

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## Recommendations

1. The bill does not fully recognize the harmful effects of cannabis on the developing brain, as noted in a May 2017 *Canadian Medical Association Journal* editorial. In addition, a 2014 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health report stated unequivocally that “*cannabis is not a benign substance and its health harms increase with intensity of use*”. We are particularly concerned about the effects of cannabis use on children with predispositions to mental health disorders.

**We recommend** that the harmful effects of cannabis be addressed by setting potency limits for cannabis products by either federal or provincial regulation, and that cannabis quantities and potency be restricted for those under the age of 25. Similar to what has already been proposed for alcohol products, we recommend that higher taxation levels be applied to higher potency products.

2. One of the stated intentions of this bill is to decrease youth access to cannabis. We believe that regardless of how cannabis is legally regulated, some youth are still likely to find ways to access the substance, and that there is still a high risk of youth becoming dependent on cannabis and driving while under its influence.

**We recommend** that a nationally created and funded public health-informed strategy accompany the legal regulation of cannabis. This strategy should have a specific youth component informed by the latest evidence of what actually works to moderate use of substances by youth. The strategy should, in particular, focus on informing youth about the health risks of cannabis and the safety risks of driving under the influence of cannabis.

3. The bill makes provision for sanctions for adults who supply minors. However, we believe that the measures set out do not provide sufficient deterrence and will not help to prevent adults from selling or distributing cannabis to children and youth.

**We recommend** sanctions for adults who supply children and youth with cannabis via a strict and escalating system of penalties, similar to what is in place regarding the sale of tobacco in some jurisdictions.

4. The bill leaves some aspects of the regulation of cannabis retailers to the provinces, with the risk of creating inconsistent regulation across Canada. We are heartened by the restrictions on promotion, particularly on the promotion of products in such a way that they could reasonably appeal to youth and the restrictions on the use of cannabis products to promote events and activities. We urge further restrictions on retailers:

**We recommend** federal regulations stating that cannabis products:

- cannot be sold in retail outlets that children and youth are permitted to enter (e.g. grocery stores);
- must be sold only in retail outlets that are highly monitored and controlled;
- must use plain packaging to discourage child-friendly packaging;
- and packaging should contain information on potency and potential harmful effects, similar to packaging requirements for tobacco.

**We recommend** that retailers be subject to restrictions on the sale of cannabis in any form that could be attractive to children, such as candy.

**We recommend** that retailers be subject to restrictions on promotional signage, hours of operation, days of sale and the density of outlets.

5. The bill does not earmark a specific use for the taxes that will be collected from the sale of cannabis products.

**We recommend** that a specific percentage of taxes collected from the sale of cannabis products be prescribed in legislation to support research, public education, monitoring, harm reduction and treatment of cannabis-related issues.

6. We have concerns about section 8 of the proposed Act, regarding criminal offences for cannabis possession as they relate to youth. The current legislation makes it an offence for youth to possess more than 5 grams of cannabis while, for adults, an offence does not occur unless there is possession of 30 grams or more. While we support the objective of reducing youth exposure to cannabis, we have concerns that this could lead to the heightened criminalization of youth.