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Opinion: Why marijuana rescheduling remains controversial

The [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) received over 40,000 comments on its [proposed rule](#) that would reschedule [marijuana](#) to Schedule III. Many comments highlighted adverse outcomes for children, suggesting that rescheduling the marijuana plant versus the psychoactive ingredients in the finished product doesn't make sense.

Historically, the [DEA](#) has scheduled drugs based on the active ingredients of the finished product and not an entire plant. For example, the DEA has scheduled the finished products derived from the opium poppy plant and derivatives in four different schedules: heroin-Schedule I, Vicodin-Schedule II (less than 15 mg of hydrocodone per dosage unit), Tylenol-Schedule III (less than 90 mg of codeine per dosage unit), Robitussin-Schedule V (less than 200 mg of codeine per 100 mL). It's only logical to approach marijuana similarly.

News commentary has implied that politics may determine the decision when data and science show problematic effects on youth of rescheduling.

Research shows today's high-potency marijuana can lead to serious [adverse effects](#), including physical and psychological drug dependence/addiction and mental health symptoms and disorders, including schizophrenia. At the same time, nationwide data show alarming youth use and access.

[National Poison Control data](#) indicate a 3,311% increase in accidental ingestions from 2016 to 2022 for children 12 and under. [Symptoms](#) reported include slower heartbeats, comas, and seizures. THC vaping increased in all grades nationally, with a more than doubling increase in the past month's vaping of marijuana among 12th graders, the second-largest one-year jump ever tracked for any substance in the [2019 Monitoring the Future National Youth Survey](#).

In Colorado, one of the first states to allow commercial sales, THC is the No. 1 substance found in completed [suicides](#) for ages 10-24.

Eight former DEA administrators from both Republican and Democratic administrations submitted [comments](#) urging that a hearing should be held, "given the magnitude of the impact of the proposed rule and considering we face an unprecedented drug overdose crisis in this country." They argue that rescheduling marijuana to Schedule III is "likely the most consequential rulemaking DEA has ever attempted" and that a hearing "would enhance transparency, integrity, and public confidence in the process."

On July 25, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) and Health Subcommittee Chairman Brett Guthrie (R-KY) issued a [press release and letter](#) to Attorney General Merrick Garland and Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra expressing their concerns and the “unusual” process it is undergoing. Other members of Congress have also voiced their concerns.

At the core of concerns is a hazardous lack of clarity on how marijuana is defined. This gap in specificity has led to an anything-goes dynamic in what products can be commercially manufactured, labeled, marketed, and sold as marijuana. Today, this can include lotions with no psychoactive effects to [products](#) that pack 10 to 1,000 servings of ultra-psychoactive THC in one vaporizer or kid-friendly edible. These products have little in common except that they are derived from the marijuana plant.

This ambiguity is similar to the intoxicating hemp market after Congress legalized hemp in the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 U.S. Farm Bill). Even though Congress was careful to cap the THC potency on the plant, companies exploited the opportunity to manufacture highly psychoactive synthetic products in the lab.

In a recent [letter](#) to Congress, 21 state attorneys general from both states with and without commercial marijuana sales reported that regardless of congressional intent, “the reality is that this law has unleashed on our states a flood of products that are nothing less than a more potent form of cannabis, often in candy form that is made attractive to youth and children – with staggering levels of potency, no regulation, no oversight, and a limited capability for our offices to rein them in.”

This unforeseen result has created a public health crisis requiring yet another federal fix. It confirms rescheduling the plant rather than the psychoactive ingredients will result in harmful outcomes.

The DEA and our nation’s leaders must prioritize the health and well-being of our youngest in making marijuana rescheduling decisions. Lessons learned from our nation’s tragic experiences with other substances can inform this determination – we must and can do better. Our nation’s children and young people deserve nothing less.

[One Chance to Grow Up](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Denver that promotes the interest of children in marijuana policy.

The Washington Examiner :

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/3116515/why-marijuana-rescheduling-remains-controversial/>

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