

March 27, 2016

HB 16-1261 – Potency Amendment

Testimony for the House Business Affairs & Labor Committee

by Aleah Hortsman, Chief Operating Officer at Arapahoe House

Arapahoe House is the largest and leading provider of substance use disorder treatment services. The nonprofit offers a continuum of care from detox, outpatient services and residential rehab. They serve 15,000 individuals and families each year.

One of Arapahoe House's 20 services is a residential program for teens called StepWise. Marijuana has always been the number one drug of choice for our adolescents ages 13-18. In the last year at StepWise, Arapahoe House has seen the number of teens coming to them for help for marijuana use increase by 77 percent.

The marijuana kids' use today is much more potent since legalization. As part of their treatment plans patients have regular Urinary Analysis to test for drugs. Arapahoe House has found that two to three weeks after their first UA, marijuana is still in the kids' system. This wasn't happening prior to legalization and speaks to the high potency of THC in the marijuana that our youth are using.

You might also be surprised to learn that they aren't really smoking joints or pipes anymore. They are using in the form of candy, drinks, edibles and the most fashionable way to use marijuana right now is dabbing. Dabbing concentrates the THC in marijuana by using butane to heat it. This essentially amounts to freebasing marijuana. This impact on youth from this combination of high potency drug and intense delivery method is unknown.

Another new reality is that when these youth are detoxing from marijuana they are presenting signs of bi-polar disorder such as depression, anxiety and lethargy. The organization had not seen this volume of mental health problems during detox in prior years when marijuana potency was lower.

Arapahoe House's clinical staff see that 15 percent THC is average potency in the marijuana that the teens are using. The Netherlands health ministry and the Garretsen (GARRET-SEN) Commission reported that marijuana over 15 percent potency is considered a hard drug. Meanwhile nowhere in the world including The Netherlands has marijuana become as commercialized and available as it has in Colorado today.

Arapahoe House is on the front line of this issue – we deal with the unfortunate aftermath of Colorado children using increasingly potent marijuana in new and unique ways. As such we feel strongly that Colorado must address the issue of marijuana potency. These new and improved products must be reviewed with respect to their immediate and long term impacts on our youth. Senator Tate's amendment ensures this focus on the issue and we encourage you to adopt it.