



Oppose Marijuana Legalization

PMTA does not support Senate Bill 846 which would legalize adult-use of marijuana in Pennsylvania. Legalizing marijuana causes safety, liability, and employment challenges for the trucking industry.

Quick Facts:

- As of June 2023, 23 states have laws legalizing the recreational use of marijuana. Pennsylvania is not one of those states.
- A [National Library of Medicine](#) study on the impacts of recreational cannabis legalization found an average increase of approximately 20 percent in marijuana use frequency that is attributable to the legalization of recreational marijuana.
- In an [ATRI survey](#) of over 3,000 CDL drivers, 50 percent of drivers said it was either very common or common for CDL drivers to leave the industry for jobs that do not require testing for marijuana.
- The impacts of marijuana impairment on individual drivers and overall highway safety have yet to be adequately documented through research, and there is not a definition or quantitative threshold for marijuana impairment.

Problem:

In the eyes of the federal government, marijuana remains an illegal substance. At the state level, marijuana legalization and decriminalization is growing. As of June 2023, 23 states have laws legalizing the recreational use of marijuana. Pennsylvania is not one of those states.

As legalization increases in acceptance, there is growing interest to use the drug. According to [PEW Research survey](#) in 2022, only ten percent of Americans disapprove of marijuana legalization. 30 percent believe it should only be legalized for medical usage, and 59 percent support both medical and recreational legalization.

Additionally, studies show those once deterred by the possible criminal consequences of marijuana purchase, possession, and use may be more open to trying (or more regularly using) legal marijuana. A [National Library of Medicine](#) study on the impacts of recreational cannabis legalization found an average increase of approximately 20 percent in marijuana use frequency that is attributable to the legalization of recreational marijuana.

This poses a threat to the trucking industry's workforce challenges. According to the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI), nationally, there is a shortage of between 65,000 to 80,000 truck drivers. A positive drug test effectively removes a driver from the industry until a series of remedial steps are taken. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse (DACH) [data](#) shows more than half of all positive trucking industry drug tests are for marijuana. This data indicates that more than 100,000 drivers tested positive and were removed from duty during the three-year period of 2020 through 2022. The trucking industry also has to compete with other industries such as short-haul delivery that are not required to test for drugs, including marijuana. In an [ATRI survey](#) of over 3,000 CDL drivers, 50 percent of drivers said it was either very common or common for CDL drivers to leave the industry for jobs that do not require testing for marijuana. This only furthers the workforce shortage the trucking industry is facing.

Next, it is too soon to calculate the complete relationship between legal marijuana and highway safety outcomes. Due in part to limited funding and constrained access to marijuana for research, the effects of marijuana impairment on activities such as driving are not fully understood.

From the minimal studies that have been completed, we can deduce marijuana does negatively impact highway safety. According to the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), marijuana “is a psychoactive (mind-altering) compound that affects areas of the brain that control the body’s movements, balance, coordination, memory and judgment.” The impacts of marijuana include impaired coordination, distorted perception, memory loss, and problem-solving difficulties. Of particular concern for those operating a motor vehicle are decision-making capabilities as well as reaction times, which can be slowed by marijuana.

A [2016 study](#) by the Society for the Study of Addiction found that “acute cannabis intoxication is associated with a statistically significant increase in motor vehicle crash risk.” [A study](#) published in 2021 by ScienceDirect reviewed more than 80 past research publications to identify both the magnitude and the duration of impairment experienced after marijuana use. Peak marijuana effects were found to impair “driving performance and driving-related cognitive skills (e.g. lateral control, tracking, divided attention).” While PMTA supports more research being done to fully understand the scope of marijuana’s impact on highway safety, we believe legalization poses a significant safety risk to our drivers and, more generally, anyone on the road. According to a [University of Illinois – Chicago study](#), in four of seven states that legalized recreational cannabis, death from car crashes rose 10 percent. The potential of sharing the road with someone who is inebriated will only increase for all drivers as marijuana becomes more accessible.

Additionally, PMTA and our members are concerned legalizing marijuana will impact insurance costs. According to an [ATRI study](#) in 2023 of motor carriers, nearly half of the respondents say they are “extremely concerned” that insurance costs will increase simply because a carrier has operations in a state with legalized recreational marijuana. Over a third responded they are “somewhat concerned.”

Solution:

While there is growing acceptance and availability of marijuana in the U.S., there are significant knowledge gaps regarding the relationship between marijuana use and public safety. The impacts of impairment on individual drivers and overall highway safety have yet to be adequately documented through research. Testing impaired individuals through a quantitative measurement – which has been key to combatting drunk driving – remains elusive in the case of marijuana. There is not even a definition or quantitative threshold for marijuana impairment. PMTA believes the federal government needs to develop a national marijuana impairment test and clear impairment standards.

PMTA supports protecting a carrier’s choice to screen for marijuana. Testing CDL drivers for drug use is a logical approach to support highway safety. Marijuana-impaired drivers should never operate heavy-duty trucks. Carriers need federal protections from state and/or federal laws that would prohibit employers from screening employees for marijuana use through currently accepted testing methods.

That said, marijuana remains detectable for weeks, while alcohol and most other recreational drugs are only detectable for a matter of days or even hours when using U.S. DOT-approved testing methods. This fact has led to the removal of many thousands of drivers from the industry based solely on past marijuana use.

Rational:

Given the lack of research and measurable standards for marijuana impairment behind the wheel, the issues legalization poses to truck drivers from a safety perspective, the need for employers in the trucking industry to test drivers are operating commercial motor vehicles without impairment, and the potential staffing impacts legalization has on recruiting and hiring CDL drivers, PMTA does not support Senate Bill 846 that would legalize adult-use marijuana. We believe legalization poses a significant risk to our members, drivers and stakeholders.