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*Since the beginning of the 1900s,
Breathe California has fought for
clean air, healthy lungs
and the elimination of lung disease
in California.*

RELEASE: Criticism of Marijuana Initiatives Valid

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Last week, Rachel Barry and Dr. Stanton Glantz, two leading authorities in the field of tobacco control, released an analysis of the two primary initiatives seeking marijuana legalization. Their thoughtful analysis looked at the specifics of the proposals; what they would do and- perhaps more importantly- what they would not do. What don't they do? Breathe California agrees that these initiatives don't do enough to protect our kids and communities from the significant dangers posed by smoking.

The two ballot measures Barry and Glantz analyzed are known as the Adult Use of Marijuana Act and the Marijuana Legalization Initiative Statute. Each proposal achieves its goal slightly differently, but they have some common features around limiting access to marijuana by young people. Both proposals acknowledge and incorporate the well-established public health research that says that young people should not smoke. They do this by limiting legalization to only individuals over 21. The Adult Use of Marijuana Act even proposes a number of measures that resemble our state's tobacco and alcohol control laws. However, the question that is raised by these provisions is "Why not do more to make sure these initiatives include strong public health protections?"

Clearly the proponents acknowledge some risk to youth from marijuana. California has, in its tobacco control laws, a system that has helped to decrease our statewide youth tobacco use rate almost every year for the last 15 years. Should not any effort that legalizes recreational marijuana use also include public health protections to minimize its use?

Our tobacco control laws work well because they work together in retail settings, workplaces, and housing. Retail limitations, strict penalties, location restrictions, and antimonopoly provisions have operated to change the very way tobacco is marketed. Smoke-free laws protect some of the most vulnerable populations from secondhand smoke where they work and live. The initiatives to legalize marijuana make only initial steps in these regards. Intentional, smart regulation from the outset is vital to ensuring not just the public health, but also that the size of the marijuana industry does not become too big, too quickly.

The points made by this research resonate here at Breathe California. We understand and appreciate the social impact that criminalization of marijuana has had on low-income communities and communities of color. At the same time, we recognize that these same populations are disproportionately impacted by lung disease. We also see the benefit of regulating the marijuana industry as a legal product, since prohibition has not proven to be effective in keeping people from smoking.

At this time, Breathe California is neither supporting nor opposing any of the ballot initiatives related to marijuana legalization. Our goal at this time is to share our perspective as public health advocates. We have seen the inequitable public health impact of smoking, be it tobacco, marijuana, or anything else. Smoking destroys our lungs and for over 100 years it has been Breathe California's mission to prevent and fight lung disease on all fronts. As lung disease is now the second leading cause of death in the United States, we strongly agree with Rachel Barry and Dr. Stanton Glantz that these proposals do not do enough to recognize and mitigate the harms of smoking.