



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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"Check Against Delivery"

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Good Afternoon.

My name is Rusty Hick and I am the Executive Director of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). I'm joined by our President Laurie French, who is also a public school board trustee with the Limestone District School Board.

We thank you for this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to speak to the proposed amendments included in Bill 174, Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario and Road Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, 2017.

OPSBA represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students.

We advocate on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.

Part of our advocacy is to monitor provincial legislation that could impact our student, staff and education communities.

We recognize that Bill 174 includes implementation components that stem from federal legislation and we are working toward a July 2018 deadline. Today, we want to spend our time with you outlining our areas for partnership and how we believe education is a key component for the successful implementation of the legalization of recreational cannabis.

It is important to note that much of the actions and changes concerning the legalization of cannabis will align with current education and school board practices for tobacco and alcohol that are already applicable to students and employees. This is of course with the exception of use for medical reasons.

Today we want to talk about:

1. The concept of youth prevention programs and how we can support youth with a circle of care.
2. Changes to the *Education Act* that will be required by our boards in terms of updating policies and procedures.
3. The linkages between regular cannabis use, adolescent brain development and mental health and addictions.
4. Site locations for the standalone stores that will be selling cannabis and paraphernalia in our communities.
5. Future revenues from the sale of cannabis and where these monies might be directed.

And now I would like to turn to Laurie French.

Thank you and I would like to share with the Committee that I am also a registered nurse so I approach this issue through both an education and health care lens. I also Chair the School Health and Wellness Committee of the Canadian School Board Association who share the views presented today.

School boards are united in a common purpose. We want to maximize the opportunities for success for each and every student. We also want to ensure our employees have a safe working environment. We are actively supporting and sharing with you the views of our member school boards and sharing information with them as it becomes known.

As Rusty indicated we are particularly interested in the concept of youth education or prevention programs.

We note that under the new Cannabis Act, there is a provision to support youth, young adults and other vulnerable populations through integrated prevention and harm reduction strategies. This includes allowing police to confiscate small amounts of cannabis from young people -under 19 -without bringing them into the justice system and laying charges.

We suggest that the education sector be part of the discussion about these programs. If this involves a current student, how will youth be directed to a program and how would their school community be notified and involved?

Support must be provided by as many caring adults as possible.

This new Act requires updates to the *Education Act* so that cannabis possession, use, or selling in schools would be considered for a possible suspension and/or expulsion. It would also be added to the code of conduct governing all persons in a school.

This inclusion makes sense and would be added to the list that currently includes alcohol and illegal drugs. Public education to understand the law and what is legal or illegal must be part of introductory information.

We would also want to ensure that the use of cannabis cannot be allowed on any school related field trip, extracurricular activity or board-related outing.

We do have questions about the changes needed to update the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

There will need to be a focus on developing an integrated, incremental and age appropriate curricular approach regarding drugs and substance use starting in elementary school.

We are also very curious as to the actual date of implementation of July 2018 and what this actually means. School boards often have summer school and we want to ensure we are prepared.

We have been informed by our Ministry of Education that future additional stakeholder meetings will be occurring and we will be actively participating in those discussions.

We are concerned about the short timelines and the supports needed for all those involved in our schools.

Mental health and addictions is a serious problem in our country and school boards see this first hand in many of our students. Public awareness campaigns need to include evidence based research regarding neurotoxic effects on adolescent brain development and the link from regular cannabis use.

We strongly recommend that education outreach, training, professional development includes this information.

Students, their parents and caregivers need good information to make informed decisions to support a healthy lifestyle.

We were happy to see that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) spoke with you earlier today. We have been in communications with them about the consultation and decision making for potential site locations.

We and our member boards have been very vocal about ensuring retail outlets are not located close to schools.

While we know this will be more challenging in urban areas, school boards and trustees must be part of the discussions between the government and municipalities about the locations of the standalone stores.

I have sent a letter to my AMO counterpart asking for this to happen and we will be encouraging local trustee outreach to their municipal partners that we ask be strongly supported in our communities.

Sufficient notice must also be given to the school board and community about a potential site. We do support the requirement that before final decisions are made, there will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions about the proposed retail outlet locations.

Finally, I would like to address something that has been discussed among trustees.

We realize that revenue amounts may not be known right away, with startup and implementation costs, but we recommend consideration be given to diverting a portion of profits or a percentage of taxation, to public awareness, prevention and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

This was part of the Declaration signed by the members of the Canadian School Boards Association with National Education partners and has been sent to Education, Justice and Health Leaders across the country .

We are working closely with other provincial associations on their implementation plans and sharing leading practices.

Thank you for considering our comments.

We have a more comprehensive submission outlining our recommendation and outstanding questions that has been shared with the clerk.

We would be happy to take any questions.