

August 12, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
1315 10th St.
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are organizations engaged in youth, racial justice and public health efforts who have come together from across the state to support the implementation of Proposition 64. We are writing to offer recommendations on how to improve the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and youth through state policy regarding cannabis tax revenues.

In 2018, over 70 of our organizations came together to work with the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GOBiz) to inform the implementation of the Community Reinvestment Grants Program. We supported GOBiz as it held listening sessions about the program throughout the state. Following the listening sessions, we brought forward recommendations to GOBiz to ensure that the grant program would reach grassroots nonprofits and would truly serve individuals and those communities most impacted by mass incarceration and the War on Drugs. We applaud the GOBiz team for their willingness to shape their grant program based on feedback from people with lived experience and who are on the ground doing the work.

In addition, we have been tracking the Prop 64 Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Account (a.k.a. the Youth Fund). In regard to your administration's decisions on the allocation of the \$119.3 million in this account for this budget year, we would like to raise the following concerns:

1. The May Revise language does not reference the need to prioritize those communities most impacted by the War on Drugs. As you know, for decades the War on Drugs devastated communities of color, particularly the African American community. Thousands of people went to prison for low-level marijuana offenses. Families were driven into poverty, and children suffered the trauma of losing their parents and family members to prison. Those incarcerated have often faced lifelong joblessness. In our view, revenues created by legal cannabis need to return to those communities that suffered the most to repair some of the damage caused by past government policy. We also believe these investments will have a greater impact if they are concentrated in certain communities where the need is greatest rather than being spread thinly across the state.

2. The May Revise does not present a coherent strategy to address youth substance abuse prevention and treatment. The budget dedicates two-thirds of the funding to childcare, creates a \$20 million grant program at DHCS, and a \$5.3 million program at the Natural Resources Agency, and allocates \$12 million to DPH. In addition, there is a reference to funding youth programs in the 20% allocation for public-safety related activities. The underlying strategy for these seemingly uncoordinated investments is unclear. If we take a piecemeal approach, we will miss out on an opportunity to make a significant, long term impact on youth substance abuse.
3. This proposal was developed without any input from young people and youth workers who encounter the day-to-day reality of poverty, trauma and addiction. Young people and individuals who work with youth in communities impacted by mass incarceration need to play a central role in identifying effective interventions. The approach to the May Revise was purely top down and discounted the value of input from those with direct experience with the causes and effects of youth substance abuse. DHCS recently created an advisory committee to provide feedback on the new \$20 million grant program, but this committee does not include youth voice and grassroots participation. We will also want to emphasize that if local communities feel a sense of ownership in the implementation of Prop 64, we will have a much greater impact on making change in the long run.

We want to partner with your administration to ensure that these new funds have the greatest impact over time and lead to greater community engagement in addressing trauma, healing and youth development. As you and your team prepare the January budget proposal over the next few months, we urge you to do the following:

1. Prioritize using Youth Fund revenues to bring supports to communities most impacted by the War on Drugs, particularly African American communities. It should be clear how the allocation of these funds will bring opportunity and healing to the most impacted communities.
2. Review all the programmatic investments from Prop 64 and develop a plan that shows how these investments add up to a coherent prevention and treatment strategy. Currently, Prop 64 cannabis tax revenues that support youth and/or community services are spread among the following agencies:
 - a. Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development
 - b. Department of Health Care Services
 - c. Department of Education
 - d. Department of Public Health
 - e. California Natural Resources Agency
 - f. Board of State and Community Corrections

We would like to see a strategy through which various vulnerable youth populations are reached through these funding streams, all through the lens of prioritizing most impacted communities. For example, a comprehensive strategy would identify which funding stream would serve the needs of young children, which would serve adolescents, which would serve youth entangled in the juvenile justice system, which support a two-generation/family support strategy etc. The strategy needs to consider the unique contexts of each community: African Americans, Latinx, immigrants, tribal communities and LGBTQ youth and families. The separate funding pieces should form a whole picture of healthy youth and communities. In addition, there should be deep analysis into how these funds can complement other funding streams, such as those for mental health services, and how they might serve to leverage more federal funding.

Finally, we recommend that your team consider whether dividing up the Youth Fund among numerous agencies may dilute its impact and may make it more difficult to implement a coherent, community-rooted strategy at the local level.

3. Form a Governor's Task Force to assist state officials with forming a more comprehensive substance abuse prevention and intervention strategy. This task force should be comprised of young people, community leaders and policy experts with experience in addressing youth substance abuse and who share a focus on racial and health equity, including individuals who are system-impacted. Young people could play a critical role in identifying which prevention investments have the greatest impact. This task force would be dedicated to offering recommendations on how to knit together the various funding streams from cannabis tax revenues to best serve local communities. We believe this would be a more efficient and impactful approach than establishing separate advisory committees for each funding stream.

The approval of Proposition 64 marked an important shift in drug policy in California, moving us away from punishment and incarceration toward prevention and healing. In order to truly benefit from this shift, we need to make the most of the new tax revenues generated by legal cannabis. This need is even more urgent given that the cannabis industry is rapidly becoming corporatized and is developing sophisticated marketing and product development techniques designed to increase use and addiction.

We understand that our recommendations would make the implementation of these aspects of Prop 64 more cumbersome. We believe, however, that this is worth doing well given that we rarely see the creation of a new, ongoing funding stream to support children and youth. We are prepared to work with your administration to maximize the impact of these new revenues and build community participation over the long-term to ensure success. Jim Keddy from Youth Forward (jim@youth-

forward.org) will be following up with key staff in your administration to follow up on this letter.

Sincerely,

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