



August 12, 2026

Dear Mayor McCarty and Members of the City Council,

We are two local young people who aspire to attend medical school and to participate in advocacy on health issues. This summer, through an internship at Youth Forward, we have researched products for sale at local vape and smoke shops here in the city of Sacramento.

As you may recall, in early 2024, Youth Forward presented research to the city's Law and Legislation Committee and to the County Board of Supervisors, on the widespread sale of intoxicating hemp products in local vape and smoke shops, corner stores, and gas stations. These look-alike cannabis products often were more potent and had higher amounts of THC than what is legal for sale in cannabis dispensaries. In partnership with Breakthrough Collaborative, we supported two 17-year-old youth leaders who purchased these products in several vape shops in the area. As we had heard from many young people, vape shops often sell to minors. Youths and young adults who regularly use high THC products are at greater risk for developing mental illness including schizophrenia and psychotic behavior, compared to those unexposed to such substances.

That summer, the County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance to ban these products in unincorporated areas. The City took no action. Fortunately, a few months later, in September of 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom enacted a statewide ban on these products. In the fall of 2025, the Governor signed AB 8, which integrated hemp products into the legal cannabis marketplace; hemp products are now regulated by the same policies as legal cannabis.

Our research this summer is a continuation of this earlier work and is part of a statewide research project on vape and smoke shops conducted by Dr. Lynn Silver at the Public Health Institute. Our goal is to reduce harm caused by addiction and overdose in our community by identifying whether local vape and smoke shops are selling dangerous, addictive products and marketing to youth. Specifically, we looked for the following products:

Kratom and 7-OH - Kratom is derived from the leaves of the kratom plant, *Mitragyna speciosa*, which contains 7-hydroxymytragynine (7-OH). The substance is mainly used by crushing the leaves into a capsule and then ingesting them orally. At low doses, it

promotes alertness, but at high doses, it can become sedative. In October of 2025, the California Department of Public Health declared kratom and 7-OH to be illegal for sale. In an analysis of the most recent data from 2022, the Center for Disease Control found kratom to be implicated in 864 overdose deaths in 30 states. In California, from 2020 to 2022, kratom was implicated in 242 overdose deaths.

Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) - Nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, has a long history of medical use. It is inhaled as a gas and is a fast-acting sedative. Recreational and excessive use of nitrous oxide can cause serious health complications, including chronic brain damage, spinal damage, and death. In California, nitrous oxide is legal for medical, culinary, and automotive uses, but it is prohibited to sell, distribute, or possess it for recreational purposes, especially with flavor or in quantities larger than 8 grams.

Psilocybin ("Magic Mushrooms") - Psilocybin, also known as magic mushrooms, is a hallucinogen found in *Psilocybe* mushrooms, which are ingested orally. This can induce psychosis, and at higher doses, psychotic behavior and death. Psilocybin was criminalized in California through a series of legislation in the California Uniform Controlled Substances Act of 1972. Other state laws prohibit the cultivation, sale, and possession of *Psilocybe* mushrooms. There are ongoing efforts to decriminalize it through therapeutic frameworks.

Intoxicating Hemp - Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, a drug derived from the plant *Cannabis sativa*. Intoxicating hemp products contain lab-made THC, causes amplified side effects and addictiveness. As opposed to natural THC from marijuana, side effects of synthetic hemp are 30 times more likely to result in needing emergency medical care and can be deadly (National Institute on Drug Abuse, [NIDA], 2026). With ever-changing chemical formulas, psychological and physical effects remain unpredictable. As previously mentioned, since 2024, there has been a ban on synthetic THC products sold in vape and smoke shops in California.

As part of our investigations during July of 2026, we inspected 16 vape and/or smoke shops throughout the city of Sacramento. All stores were within the city limits. Of these, we found either kratom, 7-OH, nitrous oxide, or psilocybin products at over half of the stores (9 stores). There were at least two stores where these products were visibly and readily displayed. We identified the distance of the closest school to each shop and the school type (elementary school, middle school, high school, etc.). Notably, two stores were within 600 ft of high schools, one store was within 1,200 ft of a high school, and one store was within 600 ft of a middle school. One store that stood out for its prevalence of kratom is named Twisted, located on J St in the Fab 40's. In a separate document, we have a lengthier description of our research, including the full names and addresses of the stores we investigated.

Based on our findings, violations of existing laws prohibiting the sale of these products are not uncommon. We urge the City Council to direct city authorities and related agencies to regularly inspect vape and smoke shops and properly enforce existing laws on the sale and use of kratom, 7-OH, nitrous oxide, psilocybin, and other such products for recreational purposes in the City of Sacramento. Violations of existing laws, especially if repeated, should carry appropriate and meaningful consequences to the vendors responsible, including penalties on their licence. The proximity of some stores to middle and high schools increases the exposure of youths to these substances, which may make them more accessible and increase the likelihood of using these products.

Thank you for considering our work and recommendations as well as your efforts to protect the health and well-being of the youths and young adults of Sacramento. We would be happy to meet with you and/or city staff to discuss these findings in more detail.

Sincerely,

Cayla Divodi
CSU Sacramento, Class of 2026
cayla.divodi@gmail.com

Youlin Zhu
UCLA, Class of 2027
jerryzhu124945@gmail.com

Cc: Police Chief Zachary Bales
City Manager Maraskeshia Smith
YPCE Director Jackie Beecham