



Santa Cruz County Friday Night Live Partnership Youth Council

PVPSA Empower Watsonville



3/21/2025

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street, Room 500
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors,

We are Youth Leaders from Santa Cruz County Friday Night Live Partnership Youth Council and Empower Watsonville. We are teaming up to share our concerns around the proposed changes to local cannabis policy. Our top concerns include impaired driving, normalization and how that contributes lower perception of harm among youth, gaps in compliance, and inclusion of health and safety best practices to keep our community safe.

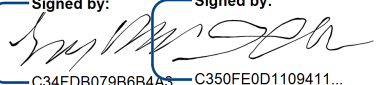
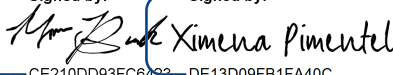
As high school students, getting a drivers license is one of those honored rights of passage to gain independence. We take drivers education classes in the graduated drivers license program that prepares us to hit the road safely and responsibly. But we need our policy makers to ensure our roads are safe for us to use as well. Onsite consumption concerns us as cannabis use can impair safe driving. Cannabis use can slow reaction time, distort perception, and impair ability to make decisions and physical coordination ([Impaired Driving Facts | Impaired Driving | CDC](#)). In 2022, Santa Cruz County saw more than 1600 DUI arrests ([California Office of Traffic Safety](#)). The California Office of Traffic Safety states that people who drive immediately after using cannabis may increase their risk of getting into a crash by 25 to 35 percent. The impairing effect increases rapidly and lingers. The method of use can delay effects too whether cannabis is smoked or ingested ([Drug-Impaired Driving | Office of Traffic Safety](#)). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducted a study where they looked at more than 4,000 drivers who were seriously injured in crashes and found that 25% tested positive for cannabis ([Update to Special Reports on Traffic Safety during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency: Fourth Quarter Data \[Traffic Safety Facts\]](#)).


Impaired driving does not just impact drivers. Passengers and youth are impacted themselves. According to the 2021-2023 California Healthy Kids Survey, 30% of 7th grade students in Santa Cruz County have ridden in the car driven by someone who had been using substances ([Santa Cruz County 2123 Sec CHKS.pdf](#)). The risk is too high for our friends and peers.

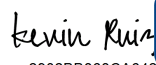


We are interested in the factors that contribute to youth substance use and how we can make changes to prevent initiation of use and increase protective factors. Research shows that the closer cannabis retailers are to where youth live, learn, and play, the more likely they are to use earlier in life ([Examining Associations Between Licensed and Unlicensed Outlet Density and Cannabis Outcomes From Preopening to Postopening of Recreational Cannabis Outlets - PubMed](#)). Allowing onsite consumption on farms and purchases at farmstands increase in the number of places where people can buy cannabis raises more concerns over normalization and reduced perceptions of harm among youth who will now see cannabis as accessible as strawberries, honey, and other non-age restricted produce. Youth Leaders have submitted letters for the January 28th and March 11th Board of Supervisor meeting expressing our concerns. At the last Board of Supervisors meeting on March 11th, Youth Leader Luci Dodson spoke during public comment. Today we ask that you strongly consider including health and safety best practices to the ordinance, increase transparency or what the tax revenue would pay for, and consider how this would be the first time our county allows farmstand sales of age-restricted substances.

With tourism season right around the corner, our streets will be packed with out-of-town visitors and with continued construction projects and proposed onsite consumption, we are concerned about increased impaired driving. Related is the lack of Drug Recognition Experts, sufficient field testing for cannabis, availability of high potency products, and inconsistent affects of cannabis on individuals. Local policies can reduce impaired driving and reenforce the age restriction and potential harms of cannabis to youth. Some policies include training servers on how to notice when someone is intoxicated or impaired, establish clear monitoring policies for consumer behavior and intervention strategies that prevent impaired driving, and increase law enforcement training in cannabis impairment detection through Drug Recognition Expert training and oral swab testing. Businesses can provide ride share and sober driver options to consumers onsite and promote social media campaigns designed to amplify safe ride options and prevent impaired driving.

Thank you for considering our concerns and prioritizing the health and safety of youth and our community.

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SCCFNLP Youth Council and Empower Watsonville