

Protect our kids from high-potency pot

**GUEST
 OPINION**



**MICHELLE
 PRIOLA**

Our oldest child started using high-potency marijuana at the age of 14. He got it from his friend's older brother. His discovery has had a profound impact on his life and our family.

Three years later, he had dropped out of high school and faced mental health crises, and we enrolled him in a \$45,000 residential treatment program. When he returned, we felt that we had our son back. He grew a lot. Yet, the impacts of his former marijuana use still interfere with his ability to reach his life goals.

I've learned that many other families have endured similar challenges. As more of us reveal our stories, more families are empowered to share theirs, as well. They describe the toll on kids of this new generation of radically different products with ultra-high concentrations of THC, marijuana's main mind-altering chemical. Each of their stories is heartbreaking.

Let me tell you a bit about my son. He is bright, athletic and handsome — an all-around great kid. I know a lot of parents say that, but he really is. At his Catholic high school, he took AP and honors courses. He played hockey, baseball, and football. In fact, he first tried marijuana at a football teammates' sleepover.

Marijuana isn't something for outsiders these days — it's gone mainstream in our middle and high schools.

His life quickly went downhill from there as marijuana came to dominate his life. He was vaping and dabbing concentrated THC. These concentrates were easy for him to hide.

He tried another school. Then we home schooled him. Then another school. Then he dropped out.

He lied to us and stole from us, until we decided he had had to leave our home. Eventually, he lived in a camper next to our house because we didn't trust him to be inside at night with our other three kids. His behavior was erratic and unpredictable. He would be enraged one minute and



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Labs can test marijuana to determine concentrations of the mind-altering ingredient THC.

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It's common for marijuana advocates to blame all the harm their products cause on parents.

So let me tell you a bit about myself.

I've been married for a quarter-century to my husband, Kevin, a state senator who works in commercial real estate. We both went to the University of Colorado at Boulder,

where I trained to be a teacher. I stayed home to parent our son full-time for his first decade.

Parents like us are doing our best, but massive marijuana commercialization in Colorado and ultra-high potency products have created a minefield today's families must navigate.

If you don't believe me, talk to any family with teens in one of the

states with marijuana mass commercialization. Ask the teens what they see.

My husband, Kevin Priola, helped enact Colorado House Bill 1317 this year.

This bipartisan law shows a path forward for other states and Congress to limit young people's access to these high-potency products, which harm their growing brains. It also funds extensive research to build on the growing body of evidence of the health impacts of these concentrated THC products.

At this point, the marijuana legalization trend is well established nationally. But it's possible to accept that new reality, while remaining vigilant to ensure that the next generation's futures are not undermined by the proliferation of these risky products.

Michelle Priola lives in Henderson.