



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 10, 2026

Contact:
Jim Keddy, Youth Forward
info@youth-forward.org / 916-248-1706

Child Advocates Sue California Over Broken Cannabis Promises to Protect Kids

Lawsuit: California Let “Big Cannabis” Cut Taxes, Undermine Prevention Programs

San Francisco, CA - Child advocates have [filed a lawsuit](#) against the California Department of Cannabis Control (DCC), accusing the state of abandoning the promises made to voters when cannabis legalization was approved under Proposition 64 in 2016.

The lawsuit, filed February 19th, 2026, in the Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco, argues that California officials have repeatedly sided with the cannabis industry by cutting cannabis taxes meant to fund child care and youth programs.

Advocates say these actions have undermined two central commitments made to voters: that legalization would **protect children and fund prevention programs**.

Plaintiffs in the suit are **Youth Transforming Justice** and **East Bay Asian Youth Center**. Two mothers who rely on childcare through Proposition 64, San Diego voter **GiaLori Blaylock** and Registered Nurse **Quinn Chung**, are also plaintiffs. The lawsuit is supported by **Youth Forward**, **Parent Voices**, and **Getting It Right from the Start at the Public Health Institute**, among others. **Olson Remcho LLP** is representing the plaintiffs with **Margaret Prinzing** as lead counsel.

“This lawsuit is about holding the state accountable for promises made to California voters,” said **Jim Keddy**, executive director of **Youth Forward**. “Voters were told that if cannabis was legalized, the industry would pay its fair share to protect kids and fund prevention programs. Instead, we’ve seen the opposite: taxes cut at the request of the industry, products designed to appeal to kids, and skyrocketing exposure to high-potency cannabis.”

“The cannabis industry promised responsibility,” said **Don Carney**, executive director at **Youth Transforming Justice**, “but what we’re seeing is an industry behaving like Big Tobacco, prioritizing profits over children.”

- MORE -

<http://www.youth-forward.org/>

When voters approved Proposition 64 in 2016, they approved two cannabis taxes, a cultivation tax and an excise tax, specifically intended to fund programs supporting child care, youth services, drug prevention, and environmental cleanup.

Advocates say state leaders have steadily weakened those commitments.

In **2022**, lawmakers eliminated the cannabis cultivation tax through **AB 195**. In **2025**, the Legislature reduced the cannabis excise tax through **AB 564**.

“These decisions reduced funding for child care, youth programs, drug prevention, and environmental restoration by **approximately \$128 million per year**,” said **David Kakishiba**, executive director of the **East Bay Asian Youth Center**. “Our lawsuit seeks to restore the cannabis excise tax to its earlier rate and prevent the Department of Cannabis Control from diverting funds intended for children and environmental protections into agency operations.”

Under Proposition 64, advocates argue, state regulatory costs were supposed to be funded through **industry fees, not through funds dedicated to public services**.

State cannabis tax revenues are the single largest state funding stream for **affordable child care**.

Separate from the lawsuit, advocates also say the state has failed to stop the cannabis industry from producing and marketing products that appeal to children.

Cannabis edibles are frequently packaged and flavored to resemble candy, sodas, and other sweets, creating a serious risk that young children may accidentally consume them.

A **2025 California State Auditor report** found that calls to the California Poison Control System related to cannabis ingestion by children age five or younger increased **469 percent** following legalization.

Meanwhile, the potency of cannabis products has dramatically increased.

A **February 2026 Kaiser Permanente study** involving nearly **500,000 teens and young adults** found that cannabis use by teens 13 to 17 years old **doubles the risk of psychotic and bipolar disorders by the time they turn 25**.

Advocates say these trends show that the cannabis market today bears little resemblance to the one voters were promised in 2016.

“Voters were told cannabis legalization would create a tightly regulated industry focused on adults,” said **Dr. Lynn Silver**, senior advisor with the **Public Health Institute**. “What we have now is an aggressively commercialized industry producing high-potency products, packaging many like candy, and pushing them into the marketplace with inadequate safeguards for children, and rising addiction of youth. Addiction that requires funding to address.”

- MORE -

Legislative Efforts to Address the Problem

Child advocates have attempted to strengthen protections through legislation.

In **2023**, **AB 1207 (Irwin)** sought to restrict cannabis marketing practices that appeal to children, but the bill was vetoed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Assemblymember Irwin is in the process of introducing new legislation to address these concerns and to protect children (**AB 2249**).

Advocates say the lawsuit is intended to ensure that the state honors the commitments voters were promised when cannabis legalization was approved.

“This lawsuit is about restoring the public safeguards that voters expected,” Keddy said. “Legalization was never supposed to mean an unchecked industry putting profits ahead of children.”

Copies of the legal filing can be found here: [YOUTH TRANSFORMING JUSTICE; EAST BAY ASIAN YOUTH CENTER; GIALORI BLAYLOCK; and QUINN CHUNG vs. CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CANNABIS CONTROL; CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TAX AND FEE ADMINISTRATION; and MALIA M. COHEN, in her official capacity as the Controller of the State of California](#)

###