

# DeSantis Faces Backlash Over Ads Tying Cannabis to Car Crashes

## Florida DOT Ad Campaign on Cannabis-Related Driving Draws Criticism Ahead of 2024 Legalization Vote

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is facing backlash after a taxpayer-funded advertisement, produced by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), was accused of influencing voters against the **marijuana legalization measure**, known as **Amendment 3**, set for the November 2024 ballot. The 30-second public service announcement (PSA) warns against the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis.

While presented as a safety warning, critics argue that the ad crosses a political line by echoing opposition rhetoric, which has led to significant controversy ahead of the statewide vote on marijuana legalization.

### Outrage Over Alleged Political Influence

The FDOT ad has sparked anger among advocates for Amendment 3, particularly those from **Smart & Safe Florida**, the campaign behind the ballot measure. The group condemned the use of taxpayer money to fund what they see as a thinly veiled attempt to sway public opinion. They accuse the state of funneling anti-cannabis messaging through a government agency, thereby reducing the costs typically associated with political advertising.

Smart & Safe Florida claims that the DeSantis-backed political committee, **Vote No on 3**, is using state resources to amplify its opposition to marijuana legalization. In response, the campaign sent **cease and desist letters** to around 50 news stations across the state, condemning what they describe as an improper use of taxpayer money to push a political agenda.

The campaign also criticized news stations for refusing to air what it called a “**politically neutral**” alternative ad and accused the stations of participating in a scheme to provide the state with cheaper ad rates for the PSA.

### The Debate Over Cannabis and Driving Safety

At the heart of the controversy is the ad’s claim that **DUI crashes increase in states with legalized marijuana**. This statement has drawn scrutiny from marijuana advocates and experts, with some questioning its accuracy and intent. While research on the link between cannabis legalization and impaired driving is ongoing, federal reports have indicated that the effects of cannabis on driving are **not yet fully understood**, and studies have yielded mixed results.

Some research suggests that while marijuana use can impair driving, the relationship between legalization and an increase in traffic incidents is not clear-cut. Advocates argue that presenting a direct link without sufficient evidence is misleading and could contribute to fear-based opposition to the marijuana legalization

measure.

## **Political Fallout: Democrats and Republicans Weigh In**

The ad has caught the attention of political figures on both sides of the aisle. **Nikki Fried**, chair of the **Florida Democratic Party**, has been a vocal critic of Governor DeSantis, accusing him of using public funds not only to campaign against marijuana legalization but also to oppose a separate measure, **Amendment 4**, which deals with reproductive rights. Fried and other Democrats have raised concerns about the fairness and ethics of using taxpayer money to push a political message.

Former Republican state senator **Jeff Brandes** has also weighed in, warning that the governor's use of public funds for political purposes sets a dangerous precedent. Brandes questioned whether such expenditures are permissible under **Florida's state budget**, emphasizing that using taxpayer dollars to indirectly fund political campaigns could lead to broader ethical concerns.

The controversy surrounding the ad has added fuel to the already heated debate over **Amendment 3**, which seeks to **legalize recreational marijuana** for adults in Florida. Supporters argue that legalization would bring much-needed criminal justice reform and economic benefits to the state, while opponents, including the DeSantis administration, have raised concerns about public safety, particularly regarding impaired driving and youth access to marijuana.

## **Impact on the 2024 Cannabis Legalization Vote**

With the 2024 election on the horizon, the battle over **Amendment 3** is expected to intensify. The use of the FDOT's resources to produce and broadcast a message that aligns with the **Vote No on 3** campaign has raised questions about the separation of government functions and political advocacy. Advocates for legalization argue that public safety messaging should be neutral and fact-based, rather than reflecting one side of a politically charged issue.

The controversy surrounding the ad could also galvanize support for the pro-legalization movement, as voters become more aware of the strategies being employed to sway public opinion. At the same time, concerns about impaired driving and road safety will likely remain central to the arguments put forth by opponents of Amendment 3, including **Governor DeSantis** and other conservative leaders.

As the debate continues, voters will ultimately decide whether recreational marijuana becomes legal in Florida, a decision that could have significant implications for the state's economy, criminal justice system, and public safety policies.

The FDOT ad campaign warning against the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis has sparked significant controversy in Florida, with critics accusing Governor **Ron DeSantis** of using taxpayer money to influence the outcome of the **Amendment 3** vote on marijuana legalization. While the ad is framed as a public service announcement, opponents argue that it serves as a political tool to promote opposition to the legalization measure. As the November 2024 election approaches, the ad has become a focal point in the broader debate over cannabis policy and public safety in Florida.

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