

# 2022- 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# Officers and Board Members

## **Founder**

Betty S. Sembler (1931-2022)

## **Chair**

James W. Holton  
President, Holton Companies

## **Secretary / Treasurer**

Stephanie Haynes  
Community Advocate

## **Directors**

Calvina Fay  
Executive Director, Drug Free America Foundation & S.O.S.,  
retired 2018

Jim Frishe,  
Blue Herron Consulting, Inc.

T. Williard Fair,  
President, Greater Miami Urban League

# **Our Mission Statement**

**Save Our Society From Drugs (S.O.S.) is a 501(c)(4) national nonprofit organization committed to establishing, promoting, and enabling sound drug laws and policies that will reduce illegal drug use, drug addiction and drug-related illness and death. Our purpose is to help Americans advocate for sound drug policies.**

**We work to educate our nation's lawmakers and activate grassroots anti-drug coalitions to promote policies that enhance community health and safety.**

**We provide support and resources to professionals working in fields that are impacted by drug use and abuse such as prevention and treatment providers, medical doctors, lawmakers, teachers, law enforcement officers and others who are working to build a better future.**

**S.O.S. takes a comprehensive approach to promote sound drug policy that includes education, prevention, abstinence based treatment, scientific research, and community awareness.**

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# SOS Advocacy & Policy Engagement

For over two decades, Save Our Society From Drugs (S.O.S.) has been at the forefront of drug policy advocacy—championing evidence-based strategies and elevating public discourse on the harms of drug legalization and commercialization. In 2022 and 2023, S.O.S. expanded its leadership role by actively shaping policy conversations, empowering communities, and directly influencing decision-makers at the local, state, and national levels.

## Advancing the Dialogue

S.O.S. served as a trusted resource on emerging drug trends and policy solutions by presenting research and recommendations to state associations, civic and community organizations, and legislative delegation meetings. We partnered with local coalitions to provide expert speakers at town halls and drug summits, helping to translate complex policy issues into actionable community-level solutions. These efforts strengthened public understanding of the consequences of drug normalization and reinforced prevention-first strategies.

## Strategic Advocacy and Legislative Impact

S.O.S. continues to collaborate with national partners and local coalitions to provide compelling testimony before state legislatures, ensuring that the voices of families and communities are heard. We prioritize legislation that protects public health by restricting access to addictive substances and holding the commercial drug industry accountable. Recognizing that many of our partners are restricted from lobbying due to funding rules, S.O.S. often steps into a lead advocacy role—providing customizable toolkits, data-driven talking points, and policy briefs to ensure every community has a voice. In many cases, we serve as the primary advocacy arm for coalitions and groups working at the grassroots level.

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# Digital Outreach and Influence

S.O.S. leverages social media as a powerful advocacy tool, using Twitter to engage directly with policymakers and media on key legislation and trending drug topics, and Facebook to amplify educational content, action alerts, and breaking research. In 2022 and 2023, our digital reach surpassed 20,000 individuals, creating sustained visibility for prevention-focused messaging and driving civic engagement in real time.

## Localized Advocacy Efforts in Illinois and Florida

From 2022 through 2023, Save Our Society From Drugs (S.O.S.) remained steadfast in its mission to organize community voices against the rapid and often unchecked expansion of marijuana commercialization in local neighborhoods. Across nine campaigns in Illinois and one in Florida, S.O.S. engaged 1,178 individual advocates, who collectively sent 8,821 letters to local officials urging them to prioritize public health and safety over commercial marijuana interests.

Using a combination of citywide flyer distribution, targeted messaging, and digital engagement, S.O.S. empowered citizens to speak out and make their concerns known—ensuring elected officials heard directly from the communities they serve.

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## Park Ridge (2022)

Following a 2021 referendum approving up to two dispensaries, S.O.S. launched a four-flyer campaign and mobilized significant opposition to dispensary proposals at two locations. While the first dispensary was approved, the second proposal—on a residentially-zoned site—was defeated by a 4-3 vote after strong grassroots mobilization.

337 advocates | 2,896 letters

## Rolling Meadows (2022)

A proposal to allow multiple new dispensaries, a grow facility, and a consumption lounge was scaled back after four flyer drops and an energized advocacy effort. The city ultimately approved only one additional dispensary.

84 advocates | 168 letters

## Arlington Heights (2022)

Despite vocal opposition and large-scale flyer distribution, the village extended a marijuana pilot program by a 6-1 vote. S.O.S. efforts ensured that community concerns were voiced and documented.

319 advocates | 2,714 letters

## Palatine (2022)

After the planning board approved a new dispensary, S.O.S. activated residents through a two-flyer campaign and digital advocacy. While the measure passed, two council members opposed the initiative, citing concerns about youth health risks.

97 advocates | 686 letters



## **Streamwood (2023)**

To oppose a second dispensary in a C-2 commercial district, S.O.S. distributed 27,400 flyers. The village board approved the measure unanimously, but the effort raised critical community awareness.

36 advocates | 259 letters

## **Elgin (2023)**

Ahead of a vote approving Elgin's first dispensary, S.O.S. distributed three rounds of flyers to residents within a three-mile radius. Despite public concerns—including proximity to child-focused businesses—the measure passed 5-2.

61 advocates | 558 letters

## **Warrenville (2023)**

S.O.S. launched a preemptive flyer campaign opposing an increase in special use cannabis permits. The city council nonetheless passed the ordinance unanimously as part of a consent agenda vote.

51 advocates | 468 letters

## **Glendale Heights (2023)**

In late 2023, the Glendale Heights Council voted to allow a marijuana grow facility and cannabis infuser operation. S.O.S. distributed educational flyers citing University of Illinois-Chicago data on youth safety. While the Village President voiced opposition using S.O.S. talking points, the council approved the measure.

67 advocates | 432 letters





# Collier County, Florida (2023)

Expanding its impact beyond Illinois, S.O.S. partnered with Preserve Paradise to launch a digital advocacy campaign in Collier County, Florida. Using Facebook ads targeting Republican voters, the campaign delivered 83,657 impressions, resulting in 126 advocates sending 640 letters to county commissioners. The board ultimately tabled the marijuana discussion, marking a strategic victory for the community.

126 advocates | 640 letters

## Cumulative Advocacy Impact (2022-2023)

combining hyper-local engagement with evidence-based messaging. Whether through printed flyers or digital platforms, these efforts reflect a strong and growing movement across the U.S. to safeguard public health, especially as marijuana industry lobbying continues to pressure local governments.

Total: 1,178 advocates | 8,821 letters sent

While not every campaign resulted in a policy victory, each effort strengthened our foundation of community engagement and education. Through these advocacy initiatives, S.O.S. empowered residents with the tools, information, and confidence to speak up in defense of public health and safety. Our work helped build a more informed and active citizen base—one that understands the risks of marijuana commercialization and is equipped to advocate for the well-being of their families, neighborhoods, and future generations.





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# Informative Blog Content

The S.O.S. website blog continues to serve as a vital hub for timely, accessible, and actionable information on drug policy developments at both the local and national levels. Through thoughtful analysis and strategic storytelling, our blog helps individuals understand how emerging legislation, ballot initiatives, and regulatory trends directly impact their communities. In 2022, one of our most-read blog posts—“What the Illinois Numbers Don’t Tell You: The Real Costs of Legal Marijuana”—highlighted data discrepancies and public health consequences that were being overlooked in pro-legalization messaging. In 2023, we expanded coverage to include topics like the rise in high-potency THC products, zoning concerns for dispensaries, and strategies for effective grassroots advocacy. Whether breaking down a complex bill or spotlighting a local victory, each post aims to equip readers with knowledge and tools to become informed advocates for prevention and public health.





# Looking Ahead: 2023 and Beyond

As we move into 2023 and 2024, Save Our Society From Drugs remains committed to advancing our mission to prevent the normalization and commercialization of addictive substances and to protect the health and safety of individuals, families, and communities nationwide. Building on the strength of our grassroots advocacy, policy expertise, and coalition partnerships, we are preparing for an increasingly aggressive push from the commercial marijuana industry at both the state and federal levels.

A key focus in the coming year will be mobilizing opposition to anticipated statewide marijuana legalization ballot measures—particularly in Florida, where we expect a well-funded campaign to try to rewrite the state constitution in favor of full-scale marijuana commercialization. S.O.S. will be at the forefront of this fight, arming citizens, policymakers, and community leaders with credible research, impactful messaging, and the tools they need to push back against policies that prioritize profit over public health.

We will also continue our work in states where local governments are considering expanding dispensary access, consumption lounges, and other industry infrastructure. In those communities, we will build on proven strategies: rapid-response campaigns, targeted outreach, educational materials, and data-driven messaging to elevate the voice of concerned citizens.

Looking nationally, S.O.S. will remain vigilant in monitoring federal policy developments, including rescheduling efforts and attempts to deregulate marijuana at the federal level. Through continued collaboration with national prevention partners, we will help shape the conversation in Washington and ensure that the risks of increased drug availability—especially to youth—are not ignored. Finally, we will expand our digital advocacy and media strategy to better reach and engage new audiences, equip our partners who are restricted from lobbying, and amplify the work of those standing up for prevention in their own backyards.

Together, we will continue to be a voice for common sense, prevention, and public health—no matter the challenge ahead.