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Washington, DC 20033
(202) 240-8860

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:**
Kat Murti
Executive Director
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
kat@ssdp.org

### Thousands Mobilize Against DEA's Proposed 7-OH and SR-17018 Bans as July 31 Deadline Nears

*Public opposition to the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) proposed ban on 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a naturally occurring metabolite of the kratom plant, has already surpassed the historic 2016 campaign that stopped the agency's attempt to ban kratom. Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), the largest grassroots network dedicated to replacing the War on Drugs with policies rooted in science, compassion, and human rights, has created easy-to-use advocacy tools to help the public submit comments to the federal register opposing the criminalization of 7-OH and ask Congress to stop the emergency scheduling of SR-17018 ahead of the July 31 deadline.*

**July 29, 2026 - WASHINGTON, D.C.** — Tens of thousands of Americans have mobilized in recent weeks to oppose the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) proposed emergency scheduling of 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and 5,6-dichloro desmethylchlorphine (SR-17018), generating thousands of public comments, contacting lawmakers, organizing livestreams, and sharing personal stories to highlight the harms that will be caused by the proposed bans.

Earlier this month, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) published two temporary scheduling notices to place 5,6-dichloro desmethylchlorphine (SR-17018) and 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) into Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), potentially halting scientific research and restricting access to compounds that researchers say warrant further study—not prohibition.

These orders are scheduled to take effect on or after July 31, 2026, leaving concerned members of the public one final opportunity to influence federal policy.

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The notice concerning 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) — a naturally occurring metabolite of the kratom plant, which has been used safely for hundreds of years — is currently open for public comment.

Despite the DEA announcing its intent to schedule the compounds on July 1, the public comment period was not opened until the end of the day on July 6, leaving Americans fewer than 30 days to participate.

Several organizations, including SSDP, have filed formal requests with HHS to extend the comment period for 7-OH comment collection, arguing that the shortened period does not afford a reasonable opportunity to engage substantively with the issues raised.

“What began as concern among scientists and policy experts has quickly grown into one of the largest grassroots mobilizations surrounding a federal drug scheduling action in recent history," said SSDP Executive Director Kat Murti. “The DEA should listen to the people most affected by this proposal, extend the comment period, and postpone any scheduling decision until the public has been given a full and fair opportunity to be heard.”

### A Historic Fight for Freedom & A Movement Gaining Momentum

Less than a day after the comment window opened, nearly 1,400 people attended a national educational webinar explaining the proposed scheduling actions, their scientific implications, and how members of the public could participate in the federal process.

"This was more than a livestream — it was a movement," said Jackie Subeck, Executive Director of 7-Hope Alliance, a nonprofit dedicated to safe and responsible access to 7-OH that has partnered with SSDP to oppose criminalization and provide free education about 7-OH.

The coalition opposing the proposed scheduling actions includes scientists, healthcare professionals, patients, veterans, researchers, harm reduction organizations, constitutional advocates, and businesses across the kratom industry — including companies focused on traditional whole-leaf kratom who understand that, because 7-OH is a naturally occurring metabolite found in the kratom plant, criminalizing 7-OH could have far-reaching consequences for the future of kratom itself.

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“A ban on 7-OH will result in a ban on kratom in the same way that a ban on caffeine would effectively mean a ban on coffee,” said Murti.

For many advocates, this campaign represents the latest chapter in a years-long effort to protect access to kratom and preserve scientific research. Federal efforts to restrict kratom date back more than a decade, including earlier actions in 2012 and the DEA's widely publicized 2016 proposal to place 7-OH and mitragynine, kratom's primary alkaloids, into Schedule I.

"The public has spoken — and they've spoken louder and faster than they did during the historic 2016 effort that convinced the DEA to withdraw its proposed kratom ban," said Murti. "There have already been more comments submitted in the past three weeks than there were in 2016, despite the significantly shorter comment period. That's not just public participation; it's overwhelming public opposition.”

In 2016, following widespread public backlash to its proposal to place kratom's primary alkaloids into Schedule I, the DEA ultimately withdrew its emergency scheduling notice, opened a 50-day public comment period, and received more than 23,000 comments, most of which opposed the ban.

In the past 23 days, Americans have already submitted over 27,775 comments, including over 4,000 comments submitted through SSDP’s advocacy tool.

A nationwide virtual rally hosted by the 7-HOPE Alliance with support from SSDP showcased the diversity of perspectives united in opposition to the ban,  generating nearly 7,800 additional comments and helping push public engagement to historic levels.

"This community came together to send a clear message: prohibition doesn't work, and the people who rely on these products deserve a seat at the table," said Subeck.

## Constitutional and Legal Challenges to Emergency Scheduling

Unlike the proposed threshold for 7-OH, the DEA's emergency scheduling action covering SR-17018 — a mu-opioid receptor (MOR) agonist with promising preclinical research as a potentially safer alternative to current opioid drugs — does not allow for public comments. Advocates have nonetheless used SSDP’s advocacy tool to send over 150 letters to federal legislators asking Congress to intervene.

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If finalized, SR-17018 will be placed into Schedule I for at least two years without meaningful public participation or adequate consideration of the harms scheduling could cause to scientific research, innovation, and public health.

The absence of any public comment process raises serious constitutional, due process, and administrative law concerns.

“The DEA’s emergency scheduling authority is supposed to be reserved for substances that present an imminent threat to public safety,” said Robert Rush, founder of the Rights and Reason Project and a member of SSDP's Advisory Council. “Scheduling SR-17018 will actually create a serious public health danger. Placing SR-17018 in Schedule I will effectively end critical research into a new generation of safer pain treatments that do not lead to dependence. It would also derail investigation of a compound that evidence shows allows people to discontinue opioids with little or no withdrawal symptoms.”

The Rights and Reason Project is pursuing both administrative and judicial relief to prevent the emergency scheduling of SR-17018. The Project will ask the DEA to sever SR-17018 from the other compounds under consideration and decline to schedule it based on the absence of evidence that it presents an imminent hazard to public safety. Alternatively, the Project will request that the DEA initiate formal rulemaking proceedings and provide a meaningful evidentiary hearing before imposing Schedule I controls.

The legal challenge will argue that the DEA has failed to consider the serious harm scheduling would cause to scientific research and public health, is acting arbitrarily and beyond the authority granted by the Controlled Substances Act, and has not satisfied the statutory requirements for emergency scheduling. The litigation will also raise significant constitutional claims, including improper delegation of legislative power, deprivation of procedural due process, and the destruction of protected property interests without adequate process or compensation. The Project will seek emergency relief to halt or delay scheduling and preserve the continued research and development of this potentially lifesaving compound.

“The National Institute on Drug Abuse has invested millions of dollars into the development of SR-17018. Inexplicably, the DEA is now attempting to ban it,” said Rush. We strongly believe the DEA’s action exceeds its statutory authority and the Controlled Substances Act’s

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emergency-scheduling provisions raise serious constitutional concerns. The Rights and Reason Project intends to mount a vigorous challenge. We need the public's support to ensure that this reckless action does not shut down lifesaving research and turn an avoidable mistake into a national tragedy."

## The Consequences of Emergency Scheduling: Research, Innovation, and Public Health at Risk

For many individuals, particularly those who have exhausted conventional approaches to chronic pain or substance use disorder, access to kratom-derived compounds and opioid agonists has been life-changing,

Despite the rise in use, there have been no reported deaths associated with kratom or 7-OH use alone, there is no established lethal overdose threshold for 7-OH in the scientific literature, and serious adverse events involving 7-OH alone remain uncommon. Most reported fatalities associated with kratom products involve multiple substances rather than 7-OH by itself.

SR-17018 was developed by researchers to help advance the development of safer and more effective treatments for chronic pain. In preclinical studies, SR-17018 has demonstrated a profile distinct from other mu-opioid receptor agonists, including a larger therapeutic index, reduced tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, and reduced respiratory depression.

"While it is important to note that there have been no clinical trials conducted using SR-17018, this compound has the potential to become a breakthrough therapeutic for the treatment of pain and opioid use disorder — but that will become nearly impossible if it is placed into Schedule I," said SSDP Ambassador Brooke Shockey Sanders, a neuroscience Ph.D. researcher.

Emergency scheduling could significantly delay scientific progress, eliminating opportunities to better understand safer approaches to pain treatment and substance use disorder.

"SR-17018 does not have the same mechanism of action as other opioids. Rather, it has the potential to be pharmacologically revolutionary," said Sanders. "Unlike other mu opioid receptor agonists, such as morphine, SR-17018 has been seen in preclinical studies to reduce pain, while lowering risk of respiratory depression. In an opioid overdose, respiratory depression is the key contributor to death. SR-17018 works as a biased agonist, decreasing beta-arrestin recruitment, and therefore does not possess the pharmacological properties to elicit profound interruption of respiration."

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Restricting access to novel and emerging therapeutics through emergency Schedule I placement risks delays in urgently needed scientific breakthroughs. A Schedule I designation will halt research into risks, benefits, and appropriate regulation of 7-OH and SR-17018.

“The burden of proof or the temporary scheduling focuses primarily on whether or not the substances are imminent threats to public health, not whether they are medically approved,” said Dr. Alaina M. Jaster, neuropharmacologist and Chair of SSDP’s Science Policy Committee. “Previously, we’ve seen the DEA ignore evidence in favor of medical utility through preclinical research and instead focus on findings through DEA channels or anecdotal reports of use that support their own bias. These findings are not empirical and when empirical scientific evidence is assessed by experts, it shows a different story. SR-17018 has no basis for temporary scheduling under the CSA’s own statutes, but is being lumped together with other substances simply because they are opioid receptor drugs.”

Schedule I placement would also  halt years of taxpayer-funded scientific research before clinical trials have the opportunity to determine whether SR-17018 can fulfill its therapeutic promise

"SR-17018 was developed at Scripps Research with taxpayer-funded NIH grants as part of an effort to create safer opioid medicines. When evidence began to emerge that SR-17018 had therapeutic value, the DEA moved to place it in Schedule I through an emergency process that provides no evidentiary hearing and is insulated from judicial review,” said Hamilton Morris, a chemist and science journalist who has been working with SSDP and allied organizations to push back against the ban. “Not a single overdose or death attributable to SR-17018 was identified, hundreds of reports of successful opioid use disorder treatment were ignored. American taxpayers are now being asked to fund the criminalization of the medicine they paid to create."

## Take Action Before July 31!

With public participation already exceeding the historic 2016 federal kratom scheduling campaign, SSDP is urging Americans not to lose momentum: the final days before the July 31 deadline represent the public's last opportunity to influence these proposals before they take effect.

"Now is the best time to challenge the DEA," says Soren Shade, Founder and CEO of Top Tree Herbs, a whole-leaf kratom company, and a lead organizer of the SR-17018 Prohibition Prevention Coalition (SR-PPC), which has partnered with SSDP on the campaign. "Its actions go

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against the wishes of millions of Americans, could set back research into better opioids by decades, and threaten public health. We are responding to the DEA's notices with a level of seriousness equal to the threat they pose to our rights."

Many of those speaking out against the proposed scheduling also helped oppose previous federal efforts to prohibit kratom. They say the current campaign reflects the same broad-based grassroots movement that successfully persuaded the DEA to withdraw its emergency scheduling proposal in 2016.

"A decade ago, tens of thousands of people stood up and made their voices heard, leading the federal government to withdraw its recommendation to schedule traditional kratom products. Today, tens of thousands more are matching and exceeding that level of activism, working to save 7-OH products for the million-plus Americans who rely on them to improve their health and well-being," said Jeff Smith, Executive Director of the Holistic Alternative Recovery Trust (HART), which has been working with SSDP to advocate for sensible regulation for 7-OH instead of bans. "Join us, today, in standing up for medical freedom and continued access to life-saving, natural plant alkaloids."

## Submit a Public Comment on 7-OH & Tell Congress to Oppose the Emergency Scheduling of SR-17018

The federal government is currently accepting public comments only on the proposed threshold for scheduling 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH). This limited public comment period closes on July 31, 2026. Comments submitted during this process will become part of the public record and provide an opportunity for the Department of Health and Human Services to consider the real-world consequences of this proposal before the threshold determination is finalized.

To make participating as easy as possible, SSDP has created a public comment tool that walks users through the submission process in just a few minutes while encouraging personalized comments based on each individual's own experiences and perspective.

Although the DEA is not accepting public comments on the emergency scheduling of SR-17018, members of the public can still make their voices heard by contacting Congress.

SSDP has created an advocacy tool allowing constituents to send personalized letters to their representatives in the legislature urging them to oppose the emergency scheduling of SR-17018,

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defend scientific research, and ensure promising therapeutics are supported with evidence-based policy instead of reflexive prohibition.

"This isn't just about 7-OH or SR-17018 — it's about whether federal drug policy will be guided by evidence or by fear," said SSDP's Murti. "The response over the last few weeks has shown that Americans will not quietly accept policies that undermine science, medical freedom, and lifesaving research. The grassroots movement defeated federal efforts to ban kratom in 2012 and again in 2016. Today, despite having less than 30 days to respond, the public has already exceeded the historic level of participation that helped stop those efforts. The DEA should recognize what that means: people overwhelmingly oppose these proposals. Every comment, every phone call, and every story reminds policymakers that behind these decisions are real people whose lives hang in the balance. The War on Drugs is a War on Us—but, together, we've changed the course of history before, and we can do it again."

*With chapters on campuses and in communities across the country, Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) is the largest youth-led grassroots network dedicated to replacing War on Drug policies with those rooted in evidence, compassion, and human rights.*

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For more information, please visit ssdp.org.