FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Kratom Association Expresses Profound Disappointment in Ohio Board of Pharmacy's Unquestioned Vote to Schedule Natural Kratom

Decision Relies on Outdated and Discredited FDA Narrative, Ignores Gold-Standard Science, and Threatens Tens of Thousands of Ohio Consumers

Washington D.C. – January 6, 2026 — The American Kratom Association (AKA) today expressed profound disappointment following the unjustified unanimous decision by the Ohio Board of Pharmacy to proceed with the scheduling of mitragynine (natural kratom) — a decision reached without a single question from any Board member after staff presented the required eight-factor analysis.

The absence of rigorous scrutiny is especially troubling given that the evidence and data relied upon by Board staff were drawn largely from an outdated and discredited federal narrative on kratom safety — a narrative that senior federal officials, including HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary, have explicitly rejected.

"The Board's decision today reflects a complete breakdown in scientific rigor and due process," said Mac Haddow, Senior Fellow on Public Policy for the American Kratom Association. "When a regulatory body votes unanimously to schedule a substance without asking even one question about the evidence presented, that is not careful policymaking — It is rubber-stamping a flawed and outdated narrative."

Federal Leaders Have Been Clear: Natural Kratom Is Not the Target

Both the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the FDA Commissioner have made clear that natural kratom leaf products are not the focus of federal enforcement efforts. Instead, federal concern is appropriately directed at synthetic and chemically manipulated 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) products, which present opioid-like risks to the public.

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy itself recognized this distinction when it appropriately scheduled synthetic and chemically manipulated 7-OH products through emergency rulemaking. Yet, in a deeply inconsistent and unjustified move, the Board has now extended that action to natural kratom leaf, despite the absence of credible scientific evidence supporting such a step.

A Discredited Federal Playbook Repeated at the State Level

The decision mirrors a failed federal approach that was decisively rejected in 2018, when the FDA recommended scheduling kratom at the federal level. That recommendation was withdrawn by then-Assistant Secretary for Health, Dr. Brett Giroir, who famously characterized the FDA's presentation as:

"Embarrassingly poor evidence and data and a failure to consider the overall public health."

That same characterization now applies squarely to the basis for the Ohio Board of Pharmacy's action today.

"The most astounding part of this decision by the Board of Pharmacy today is the fact that HHS rejected the recommendations for scheduling of natural kratom leaf products using the very same 8-factors in Ohio law, the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence at the World Health Organization using a less stringent criteria – both determined that mitragynine should not be scheduled," said Haddow. "What is it the Ohio Board of Pharmacy knows that these federal and international experts don't know? That answer is obvious and why the Board has to be held accountable."

Real-World Harm to Ohio Consumers

Natural kratom leaf products are responsibly consumed by tens of thousands of Ohioans, many of whom rely on kratom as a safer alternative to opioids for pain management, recovery support, or improved quality of life. Scheduling natural kratom would:

- Criminalize otherwise law-abiding consumers overnight
- Eliminate access to regulated, lab-tested products
- Push consumers toward unregulated black-market alternatives
- Undermine harm-reduction efforts during an ongoing opioid crisis

Ohio Legislature Must Act — and Act Now

Given the profound flaws in the Board's process and the reliance on outdated federal talking points that no longer reflect current science or federal policy, the Ohio General Assembly must act with urgency to protect consumers and reassert its policymaking authority.

"The Legislature cannot allow an unelected board to ban a widely used botanical based on obsolete science and unquestioned assumptions," Haddow said. "Ohio lawmakers must step in immediately to protect consumers and ensure policy decisions are grounded in facts—not fear."