

Issue: VA Marijuana Legalization Talking Points

Talking Points: Marijuana Legalization in Virginia

Background

For over four decades, states have enforced draconian drug policies, perpetuating vicious cycles of poverty, addiction, and mass incarceration, while producing little to no reduction in drug usage rates. Despite the trend in 23 states across the country decriminalizing marijuana, Virginia remains out of step in increasingly criminalizing nonviolent drug offenders, particularly for marijuana possession. If no action is taken, Virginia will continue to suffer under its misguided drug policies.

Core Message

In order to eliminate cruel punishments, lessen racial disparities, minimize the illegal drug market, and produce significant tax revenue, Virginia must move toward legal, regulated use of marijuana.

Key Facts

- From 2003-2014, arrests for marijuana possession in Virginia soared by 76%.
- Virginia is one of 14 states prohibiting individuals with felony-related drug convictions from receiving life-sustaining Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.
- Virginia's constitution, like three other states, permanently deprives ex-felons of the right to vote unless the governor individually restores this right.
- Non-violent drug offense persecution deepens racial divide. White individuals with criminal records are 50% less likely to receive job callbacks; African American are 64% less likely.
- In 2013, marijuana use was 24% greater among blacks, but arrests were 233% higher for black Virginians than white, and Blacks are 2.83 times more likely to be arrested for possession.
- In 2010, Virginia spent over \$67 million enforcing marijuana laws.
- Virginia has the 17th highest correctional budget in the nation.

Talking Points

- ☰ When constituents commit minor drug offenses, they can lose their jobs, student aid, welfare benefits, and their right to vote. These penalties are devastating, and only make it more challenging for nonviolent drug users to productively reenter society.
- ☰ There is no relationship between incarcerating drug offenders and drug usage rates. It's time we end the outmoded, ineffective "tough on crime" strategy.
- ☰ Deporting legal immigrants in this country for 20+ years for minor possession is inhumane.
- ☰ For students, being caught with a joint can mean an end to their college careers.
- ☰ Without a meaningful source of income from a job or welfare, ex-felons are more likely to turn to illegal activities to care for themselves and their families.
- ☰ Instead of criminals selling on the black market, we ought to consider legalizing and taxing the drug to gain much-needed revenue to improve the quality of life of our constituents.
- ☰ In Virginia, blacks are 2.83 times more likely to be arrested than whites for possessing marijuana. It is unacceptable that communities of color have borne the brunt of this disproportionate enforcement of marijuana laws.
- ☰ Drug use is a health issue and is treated by doctors, not by jail time.

For further details, see the full report: *Marijuana Legalization in Virginia*, available on our website at localmajority.org.