



Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

Marijuana Fact Sheet

Marijuana prohibition costs U.S. taxpayers \$10.7 billion per year in criminal justice costs. These are resources that should be focused on investigating and solving violent crime, not prosecuting marijuana smokers.

Last year police arrested a record 829,625 individuals for marijuana violations, and 89% of those arrests (739,000) were for personal use, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual [Uniform Crime Report](#). The remaining 11% were individuals charged with "sale/manufacture," a category that includes all cultivation offenses, even those in which the marijuana was being grown for personal or medical use.

This is the largest total number of annual arrests for marijuana ever recorded by the FBI. Marijuana arrests now comprise nearly 44 percent of all drug arrests in the United States. We are needlessly destroying the lives and careers of hundreds of thousands of otherwise law-abiding citizens each year in this country, for no valid reason.

In the state of Massachusetts there were an estimated 8,900 total marijuana arrests last year, with 7,300 (82%) of those arrests for personal use offenses.

Overall, there has been a dramatic 188 percent increase in marijuana arrests over the last 15 years — yet the public's access to pot remains largely unfettered and the self-reported use of cannabis remains largely unchanged. The total number of marijuana arrests in the U.S. for 2006 far exceeded the total number of arrests in the U.S. for all violent crimes combined, including murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Marijuana arrests disproportionately impact African Americans. While adult African Americans account for only 8.8% of the U.S. population and 11.9% of annual marijuana users, they comprise 23% of all marijuana possession arrests in the United States.

Convicted marijuana offenders are denied federal financial student aid, welfare and food stamps, and may be removed from public housing. Other non-drug violations do not carry such penalties. In many states, convicted marijuana offenders are automatically stripped of their driving privileges, even if the offense is not driving-related.

According to media polling, 47% of all Americans have smoked marijuana at some point in their lives. According to U.S. government surveys, 26 million American smoked marijuana just in the last year, and 15 million smoked marijuana within the last month. The vast majority of these individuals are otherwise law-abiding citizens who work hard, support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities in a positive manner. There is no justification to continue to treat them as criminals.

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (www.norml.org)

NORML

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According to numerous state and federal surveys, those 12 states that have decriminalized the responsible use of marijuana by adults have experienced no increase in usage rates compared with neighboring states that have not liberalized their marijuana laws, nor has there been any increase in the 12 states that have legalized the medical use of marijuana.

Since the 1970s, more than a dozen state and federal government-appointed commissions have examined the effects of marijuana, and made public policy recommendations regarding its use. Overwhelmingly, the conclusions of these expert panels have been the same: marijuana prohibition causes more social damage than marijuana use, and the possession of marijuana for personal use should no longer be a criminal offense.

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SUMMARY

America tried alcohol prohibition between 1919 and 1931, but discovered that the crime and violence associated with prohibition were more damaging than the evil sought to be banned. With tobacco, America has learned over the last decades that education is the most effective way to discourage use. Yet America fails to apply these lessons to marijuana policy.

By stubbornly defining all marijuana smoking as criminal, including that which involves adults smoking in the privacy of their own homes, we are wasting police and prosecutorial resources, clogging courts, filling costly and scarce jail and prison space, and needlessly wrecking the lives and careers of genuinely good citizens.