



**Working to Reform Marijuana Laws**

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**Submitted to: Connecticut Joint Committee on Labor and Public Employees**

**February 9, 2021**

**Testimony of Carly Wolf, State Policies Coordinator**

**National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)**

**In Favor of HB 6377: AN ACT To require labor peace agreements for the cannabis industry and to ensure a modern and equitable cannabis workforce.**

I wish to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for considering my testimony and holding a hearing on this important legislation.

My name is Carly Wolf, State Policies Coordinator with The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) – a Washington, DC based advocacy organization that opines in favor of evidence-based marijuana policy reforms.

I urge members of the Committee to support House Bill 6377 to establish a comprehensive social equity program focused on reducing barriers of entry into the cannabis industry. This legislation further encourages necessary reinvestment in those communities that have been the most adversely impacted by marijuana prohibition.

For decades, many of Connecticut’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities have disproportionately faced the greatest hardship and collateral consequences of the War on Drugs. Lawmakers must address this legacy by facilitating efforts to reinvest in these communities, and seeing that they benefit economically from the legal cannabis marketplace. This can be done, in part, by prioritizing small business applicants and those committed to diversity.

Communities of color have disproportionately suffered under marijuana prohibition. Historically, African-Americans have been arrested for violating marijuana possession laws at nearly four times the rates of whites, yet both ethnicities consume marijuana at roughly the same rates.

Specifically, The American Civil Liberties Union research report, *A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform* (2020) concludes: “On average, a Black person is 3.64 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person, even though Black and white people use marijuana at similar rates. Just as before, such racial disparities in marijuana possession arrests exist across the country, in every state, in counties large and small, urban and rural, wealthy and poor, and with large and small Black populations.”



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Findings in this same report show that in Connecticut in 2018, over 2,300 individuals were arrested for marijuana law violations. Of those arrested, almost 80 percent of defendants were charged with possession only. Arrests for the possession of marijuana in the Constitution State made up over twenty percent of all drug arrests in 2018.

Black people in Connecticut are four times as likely to be arrested for marijuana-related violations as are white people. In places like New London, Blacks are over nine times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites.

HB 6377 would also give adults the legal option to cultivate up to six marijuana plants for personal use. The inclusion of legislative provisions permitting the non-commercial personal cultivation of cannabis serves as leverage to assure that the product available at retail outlets is high quality, safe, and affordable. Further, many consumers prefer specific strains of the cannabis plant. Permitting consumers the option to produce these specific strains at home assures that they will have an uninterrupted and cost-effective supply of cannabis that is best suited to their own particular interests. It would also prevent those who do not live within a reasonable distance of a retail outlet, or those who may not be able to afford cannabis available at retail outlets, from purchasing from the illicit market.

Thirteen out of 15 states with legal marijuana access for adults no longer criminalize those over 21 who grow limited quantities of cannabis in private. None of these jurisdictions have ever repealed their home-grow laws, and these regulations have not created any tangible public safety risk. Connecticut citizens can brew their own beer and make their own wine for personal consumption, and it is consistent with this policy to similarly permit personal cultivation of cannabis.

It is time to correct the injustices perpetrated by the failed policy of cannabis prohibition, and to raise up these communities that have, historically, been most adversely impacted by them.

For these reasons I urge members of the Committee to support HB 6377.

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