



Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

Testimony of Carly Wolf
State Policies Coordinator, National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)
to the Judiciary Committee
in Support of LB 481, to decriminalize low-level marijuana possession offenses
February 19, 2021

My name is Carly Wolf, State Policies Coordinator for The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). I wish to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for considering House Bill 1201. NORML is supportive of legislative efforts to remove criminal penalties for the possession of personal use quantities of cannabis by adults.

House Bill 1201 amends state law so that the possession of up to one ounce of marijuana is classified as a civil rather than as a criminal offense -- punishable by a ticket of up to \$50.

Decriminalizing low-level marijuana offenses will ensure that minor marijuana possession offenders, many of them young people, are not saddled with a criminal record and the lifelong penalties and stigma associated with it.

The American Civil Liberties Union research report, *A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform* (2020) concluded: "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."¹

Findings in this same report show that in North Dakota in 2018, almost 2,700 individuals were arrested for marijuana law violations. Of those arrested, 94 percent of defendants were charged with possession only. Arrests for the possession of marijuana in the state made up almost half of all drug arrests in 2018.

Black people in North Dakota are more than five times as likely to be arrested for marijuana-related violations as are white people. In places like Morton, Blacks are almost ten times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites. North Dakota ranks 7th in the nation for largest racial disparities in marijuana arrests.

If lawmakers truly wish to reap the societal and fiscal benefits of decriminalization, and truly wish to significantly reduce the number of North Dakota adults adversely impacted by a criminal

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>





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record, then we suggest supporting the passage of HB 1201, to fully decriminalize the possession of up to one ounce of cannabis by adults.

