



I thank members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee for holding a hearing on this matter and considering my testimony.

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, advocating on behalf of the responsible consumer in favor of evidence-based marijuana policy reform.

I am providing testimony in favor of the advancement of Senate Bill 143, which would amend penalties so that the possession of up to one ounce of marijuana is classified as a civil rather than a criminal offense.

Under current law, the possession of more than ten grams of marijuana is a criminal misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$1,000 fine.

Expanding the decriminalization threshold for low-level marijuana offenses will allow police, prosecutors, and the courts to re-prioritize their resources toward addressing more serious crimes. Minor marijuana possession offenders, many of them young people, should not be 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 showed that in Maryland in 2018, 19,208 individuals were arrested for marijuana law violations. These thousands of arrests took place *after* the state decriminalized the possession of up to ten grams of marijuana.

Of those arrested, almost 90 percent of defendants were charged with possession only. Arrests for the possession of marijuana made up half of all drug arrests in 2018.

Black people in Maryland are twice as likely to be arrested as whites. In places like Queen Anne’s County, black Marylanders are almost nine times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites.

Passage of this legislation will reduce arrests and reduce racial disparities. It will also comport Maryland’s decriminalization policy with that of other states which have also decriminalized

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



The National Organization for the
Reform of Marijuana Laws

marijuana possession violations -- a majority of which have decriminalized far greater quantities of cannabis than has Maryland. In fact, most jurisdictions (such as neighboring Virginia) impose one ounce decriminalization thresholds (28.4 grams) and some states, like Ohio, impose far higher limits (100 grams).

If lawmakers truly wish to reap the societal and fiscal benefits of decriminalization, and truly wish to significantly reduce the number of Maryland adults adversely impacted by a criminal marijuana arrest, then I urge members of the Committee to support SB 143 to increase the marijuana decriminalization threshold.