

NORML[®]

Resource Guide

*Engaging Effective Activism
During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Introduction

Even during these uncertain times, NORML's mission remains the same. In fact, one can argue that our mission now is more important than ever before.

NORML's mission is to move public opinion sufficiently to legalize the responsible use of marijuana by adults, and to serve as an advocate for consumers to assure they have access to high quality marijuana that is safe, convenient and affordable.

During this worldwide health emergency, it is more important than ever that patients have safe, above-ground, **uninterrupted access** to lab-tested cannabis medicine. It is more important than ever that police and prosecutors do not waste limited resources targeting marijuana consumers. It is more important than ever that America's prisons and jails **no longer incarcerate** those charged with marijuana-related activities. It is more important than ever that essential cannabis retailers have equal **access to banking** and **small business financial assistance**.

But while NORML's mission hasn't changed, advocates' methods for accomplishing these goals have had to adapt.

During this pandemic, reformers can no longer hold large public rallies. It remains unclear when Congress will return to Capitol Hill and resume regular order. In many parts of the country, state and local legislatures are closed indefinitely — making it impossible at this time to lobby for specific legislative changes in state and local laws. In most states, constituents cannot at this time even schedule a face-to-face meeting with their lawmakers.

Given this new reality, how do activists effectively make their voices heard and continue to advocate for substantive changes in cannabis policies?

Here's how. In this guide, NORML highlights various online tools to assist reformers in their advocacy endeavors. As America awaits a return to normal, here are numerous steps that you can take today to keep successfully engaged with pundits, politicians, and other influencers during this pandemic.

Learn the facts

Knowledge is power and the facts are on our side. Want to learn more? The NORML [website](#) provides thousands of pages of cannabis-specific information. It's like having your own marijuana-centric encyclopedia.

New to cannabis advocacy? Start by checking out NORML's [Marijuana Primer](#) and our Fact Sheets. Seeking more advanced information? Check out NORML's [Library](#) archives where you will find dozens of reports, statistics, and white papers.

Familiarize yourself with the laws

Do you reside in one of the 30+ states that [permit medical cannabis access](#)? Or is your state among the eleven that have [legalized adult use](#)? Are past cannabis crimes eligible for expungement in your state? Can a marijuana arrest cost you your driver's license? [Find out.](#)

There is no other online resource that provides as comprehensive and up-to-date information regarding marijuana laws, regulations, and penalties as the NORML website. We provide a state-by-state breakdown of criminal and [civil](#) marijuana statutes, as well as in depth summaries of medical access and legalization programs.

Know where your lawmakers stand

Every state has its own statutes specific to marijuana. But these statutes are not set in stone. They are constantly being amended and reformed by state lawmakers. These lawmakers answer to you. Learn where your state and local lawmakers stand on the issue of marijuana law reform by visiting NORML's [Smoke the Vote](#) – the most comprehensive online database available for tracking politicians' records on marijuana legalization.

Know where your governor stands

America's governors are the nation's most powerful state-elected officials. They possess the power to veto legislative reforms, and they often play a key role in setting the legislative agenda and priorities for any given year. Is your governor on board with cannabis liberation? [Find out.](#) NORML has compiled a comprehensive scorecard, which assigns a letter grade 'A' through 'F' for all governors based upon their most recent marijuana-specific comments and voting records.

Thank/Shame your elected officials

Now that you know where your elected officials stand on marijuana legalization, it's time to make your voice heard. If they have received high marks from NORML, **contact** them directly and thank them for their stance. Conversely, if your elected officials are consistently on the 'wrong' side of this issue, **demand** that they amend their position – or lose your vote.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE: POSITIVE

As your constituent, I'm writing today to thank you for advocating for common sense marijuana policy reforms. It makes no sense from either a fiscal perspective, public health perspective, or from a moral perspective to target, arrest, criminalize, and stigmatize those adults who choose to consume marijuana responsibly.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE: NEGATIVE

As your constituent, I'm writing today to express my strong disapproval of your stance on marijuana policy. It makes no sense from either a fiscal perspective, public health perspective, or from a moral perspective to target, arrest, criminalize, and stigmatize those adults who choose to consume marijuana responsibly. That is why most Americans, including majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, support legalizing the adult use cannabis market. Your position is out of step with the majority of voters, and it will cost you my vote in the upcoming election.

Urge your governor to deprioritize marijuana enforcement during the pandemic

Stopping marijuana-related arrests isn't just good policy, during a communicable disease pandemic it is simply **common sense**. That is why NORML is urging governors in various states to enact emergency measures ordering law enforcement officials and prosecutors to curtail arrests for cannabis and to either release or grant clemency to those incarcerated for cannabis offenses. **Send a message** directly to your governor now asking them to take action.

Urge your members of Congress to remove cannabis from the US Controlled Substances Act

Despite our increasing success at the state level, federal law continues to inappropriately define cannabis as a Schedule I controlled substance with no therapeutic value. Congress initially designated marijuana as Schedule I – the same category as heroin – in 1970, and it remains Congress who ultimately holds the power to change this status.

Right now, bipartisan **legislation** is pending in Congress: **HR 3884 | S. 2227** -- The Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment, and Expungement (MORE) Act to remove marijuana from the federal Controlled Substances Act, thus ending federal prohibition and enabling states to set their own policies.

The Act would also make several other important changes. For example, it permits physicians affiliated with the Veterans Administration to make medical cannabis recommendations to qualifying veterans who reside in legal states. It incentivizes states to move ahead with expungement policies that will end the stigma and lost opportunities suffered by those with past, low-level cannabis convictions. The MORE Act also allows the Small Business Administration to support entrepreneurs and businesses as they seek to gain a foothold in this emerging industry.

In November, members of the Judiciary Committee in the United States House of Representatives **passed** The MORE Act by more than a two-to-one margin. The measure is the most comprehensive piece of marijuana-related legislation ever approved by a committee of Congress, and it marks the first time since the enactment of the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 that lawmakers have ever voted to remove the cannabis plant from the CSA.

The measure awaits further action in both the Senate and on the floor of the US House of Representatives. **Send a message** to your members of Congress urging them to move forward on The MORE Act.

Register to vote

You can't be a part of the solution if you're not part of the process. [Register to vote](#) and have your say in this November's election.

Submit a letter to the editor

One of the most expedient, effective and cost-effective ways to educate the voters and influence public officials is to publish letters to the editor in national and regional newspapers. The opinion section is the most widely read section of the newspaper. Letters show editors, reporters, and local representatives what the "hot" issues are among their readers and constituents, thereby encouraging both greater news coverage and political debate of those topics.

Letters should be brief (word counts vary by newspapers, but are typically no more than 200-250 words in length), accurate, explicit (be clear and direct), and persuasive. To increase one's chances of publication, familiarize yourself with your paper's editorial guidelines. Try to make your submissions timely and always seek to provide a local hook. After achieving success placing letters, consider submitting longer-form opinion pieces (op-eds) as well.

→ [How to write effective letters to the editor](#)

→ [Op-Ed Writing: Tips and Tricks](#)

Join your local NORML Chapter, or start your own

NORML has a robust network of affiliate chapters in the United States, and several international chapters. These chapters hold regular meetings, events, and lobby days, among other reform-minded activities. They are the lifeblood of NORML's grassroots.

Want to become part of a NORML chapter? Find yours [here](#).

What if there is no affiliate currently in your area? Then consider starting your own. Apply [here](#).

Write the CDC

If you use medical cannabis to treat chronic pain, the US Centers of Disease Control wants to hear from you. Recently, the agency **announced** that they are seeking public comments from patients regarding their experiences managing chronic pain conditions. They stated, “Interested persons or organizations are invited to participate by submitting written views, recommendations, and data related to perspectives on and experiences with pain and pain management.”

Studies have consistently shown that cannabis can be effective in the treatment of chronic pain, and pain patients enrolled in medical cannabis access programs typically reduce their use of opioids. If you are a medical cannabis patient with chronic pain, this is an opportunity to tell the CDC your personal story.

The CDC is accepting public comments until June 16, 2020.

Please note, public comments provided to the CDC are not confidential. According to the agency, any public comments received “are part of the public record and are subject to public disclosure. Comments will be posted here. Therefore, do not include any information in your comment or supporting materials that you consider confidential, proprietary, or inappropriate for public disclosure. If you include your name, contact information, or other information that identifies you in the body of your comments, that information will be on public display.”

Insist that cannabis access in your state remains uninterrupted during the COVID-19 outbreak

Regulators and lawmakers in dozens of states have designated licensed cannabis providers and their suppliers as “**essential services**” to the health and well-being of their communities. By taking these actions, facilities are able to stay open and provide service to their clientele during statewide or countywide “stay-at-home” mandates.

These policies recognize that vulnerable persons must not be abruptly cut off from their established supply chains or inadvertently directed toward the illicit market during this crisis, as the products available there may potentially be **tainted** or adulterated and

may further compromise patients' health. They also recognize that many patients cannot afford to stockpile months of medicine at one time, and therefore will need to continue to make frequent trips to dispensaries.

Is your jurisdiction among the growing number of states and counties taking actions to better facilitate retail cannabis access during the COVID-19 outbreak? [Find out here](#). If your municipality has not moved forward with these important steps, [urge them](#) to take local action.

SAMPLE LETTER

In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever that medical cannabis patients maintain uninterrupted and convenient access to their medicine. Vulnerable persons must not be abruptly cut off from their established supply chains or inadvertently directed toward the illicit market during this crisis, as the products available there may potentially be tainted or adulterated and may further compromise patients' health. Moreover, many patients cannot afford to stockpile months of medicine at one time, and therefore will need to continue to make frequent trips to dispensaries. That is why I am urging you to designate the state-licensed retailers as 'essential services,' and to also relax existing protocols to facilitate curbside pick-up and home delivery of cannabis products.

Demand that licensed cannabis business no longer be barred from federal COVID assistance

The state-licensed cannabis industry [employs](#) more than 240,000 American workers, over four times the number of American workers as does the coal industry. Yet, these thousands of licensed businesses, many of them small businesses, are currently [prohibited](#) from receiving financial assistance or access to low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration because of marijuana's Schedule I status under federal law.

This discriminatory practice is especially onerous now — at a time when many businesses are being adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For many

conventional businesses, the SBA is actively providing them with capital. But cannabis businesses need not apply.

[Send a message](#) to your members of Congress and tell the federal government to stop discriminating against small cannabis businesses, their employees, and the customers they serve during this public health crisis.

Demand that state-licensed cannabis business have access to conventional banking services

Federal lawmakers mandate that the state-regulated cannabis industry operate primarily on a cash-only basis – an environment that makes businesses more susceptible to theft and more difficult to audit. It also places the safety and welfare of these businesses' customers at risk, as they must carry significant amounts of cash on their persons in order to make legal purchases at retail facilities. Similarly, it needlessly jeopardizes the safety of retail staffers, who are susceptible to robbery.

No industry can operate safely, transparently, or effectively without access to banks or other financial institutions. That is why NORML is urging Congress to change federal policy so that these growing number of state-compliant businesses, and their consumers, may operate in a manner that is similar to other legal commercial entities.

Last fall, members of the US House of Representatives [voted](#) 321 to 103 in favor of [HR 1595: The SAFE Banking Act](#), which amends federal law so that explicitly banks and other financial institutions may work directly with state-legal marijuana businesses. The vote marked the first time ever that a chamber of Congress had ever held a successful floor vote on a stand-alone piece of marijuana reform legislation.

But, to date, the bill remains languishing in the Senate. [Send a message](#) to your Senator urging him/her to support The SAFE Banking Act.

Sign up for the NORML weekly newsletter and legislative alerts

Want to stay up-to-date regarding breaking cannabis news, legislative advancements, and pending votes? [Subscribe to the NORML Newsletter!](#) Delivered to your inbox every Thursday, NORML's weekly newsletter is chocked full of the most important, breaking marijuana news and developments. Newsletter subscribers also receive local updates regarding important cannabis reform efforts in their areas.

Join NORML

Despite the ongoing crisis that is before our country (and the globe), NORML and its staff are rising to the occasion to be both productive and influential in shaping the emerging worldwide narrative surrounding cannabis. *Are you with us?*

NORML's strength is in its numbers. Please take time today to consider joining the NORML family. NORML is well aware that these are difficult times financially for many of you, and we understand that some of you may not be in a position at this time to contribute to this cause. But for those of you who can, we hope that you value and appreciate NORML's ongoing efforts and will *consider making a contribution* at this time. Your past efforts have allowed NORML to be ready and able to step up at times like this, and your continued efforts will help carry us forward to the better days ahead.

Together, we will end the criminalization and stigmatization of cannabis.

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