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Maryland NORML Supports SB0949 Expungement – Possession of Marijuana

Maryland NORML is the state chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. As a grass-roots organization representing a broad range of Marylanders, we advocate for sensible, evidence based marijuana policy and respectfully urge the MD Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee vote for SB0949.

An increasing number of jurisdictions across the country are reversing the long-standing policy of marijuana prohibition. As with the end of alcohol prohibition in 1933, this shift in legislative priorities stems from a significant change in public understanding of what public policy options are available to address legitimate concerns regarding an individual's personal use of intoxicants. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that imposing criminal sanctions on individuals convicted of minor marijuana offenses is counterproductive and inconsistent with our best social aspirations.

Rather than saddling our citizens with the life and career-limiting burden of a permanent criminal record, we should support the aspirations and natural potential of every Marylander. SB0949 would harmonize pre 2014 criminal conviction standards with our updated post 2014 standards. This rational policy is especially important for those convicted of minor marijuana offenses where the specific amount of marijuana at issue is not part of the public record, or where the record shows amounts below current conviction standards.

Expunging criminal records for individuals as proposed under SB0949 will empower many of our most burdened citizens and reflect our shared commitment to helping them succeed and reach their full potential. Many of those caught up in the criminal justice system for minor marijuana offenses were undergoing a temporary period of exploration with cannabis consumption and we should not saddle them with unnecessary burdens that do not advance any discernible public interest.

In addition to limiting employment, educational, and other opportunities, a criminal record can also impose significant psychological and emotional burdens on our citizens. The stigma of carrying a criminal record dampens an individual's capacity to form positive visions of their own full potential.

Maryland NORML urges this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 949.