

March 17, 2022

Dear House Speaker Jones and Senate President Ferguson,

We, the undersigned Maryland-based organizations, are united in our support for a racial justice-centered approach to legalizing marijuana in our state. Centering racial justice means that legalization must contain strong provisions to both repair and protect against the harms of the war on marijuana on the individuals and communities most impacted by it.

The great news: A recent poll shows removing past marijuana convictions and ending odor-based searches by police appeal to Maryland voters and actually broaden support.

Unfortunately, important elements are left out of current legislation (SB 833 and HB 837) that must be added for Maryland to achieve anything resembling racial justice. There are five missing aspects of justice-related policy. And the bills do not adequately reinvest the tax dollars a legal market will bring on the communities most targeted – for decades – by racially biased marijuana enforcement and the serious consequences that have resulted.

In 2014, when the Maryland General Assembly decriminalized the possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana – it was in large part because of the severely disparate enforcement of marijuana laws on Black people. However, decriminalization was never enough, and despite the same rates of use among Black and white people – Black people in Maryland continue to be arrested overwhelmingly more than whites and at disproportionate rates.

What needs to be added?

- 1) **Eliminate all criminal penalties for possession and possession with intent to distribute cannabis.**
- 2) **Adequately address all of the marijuana-related offenses that Black people have been saddled with that have led to lack of access to employment, public benefits, and exposure to higher levels of incarceration than their white counterparts.**
- 3) **End the police practice of disproportionately and unnecessarily targeting and searching Black and Brown Marylanders due to the supposed odor of marijuana.**

- 4) **End penalties for people who smoke in public.** Otherwise, Black and Brown people will continue to face the brunt of the enforcement and unnecessary interactions with police.

- 5) **Create a community reinvestment and repair fund that allocates resources directly back to the jurisdictions that have been most impacted by the war on drugs.** This fund would allow the community to play a role in determining how those resources are allocated.

Together, our Maryland-based groups are ready to work with you to set a new model for the country. Let's create an equitable marijuana market that repairs past harms to our communities.

Respectfully,

ACLU of Maryland
Algebra Project
Baltimore Action Legal Team
Bloom Collective
Calvert PRISM
CASA
Common Cause-Maryland
Community Justice
ElevateHER Inc.
FACE Addiction Maryland, Inc
Fenix Youth Project
Jews United for Justice-Baltimore
JustUs_Initiative
Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Lower Shore Progressive Caucus
Maryland Nonprofits
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Prince George's County Young Democrats
Progressive Maryland
Racial Justice NOW
Takoma Park Mobilization
The People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland
The Talking Drum Incorporated
Schools not Jails
SURJ Baltimore

