



Decriminalization: A more sensible approach to marijuana possession in Virginia

Current penalties for marijuana possession are harsh and unjust.

- Nearly 29,000 arrests were made for marijuana offenses in Virginia in 2018, a number that has tripled since 1999. Almost half of those arrests were young people aged 18-24. [\[1\]](#)
- In Virginia, African Americans are three times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than their white counterparts, despite similar rates of use. [\[2\]](#)
- A criminal conviction for possessing a small amount of marijuana can lead to a lifetime of harsh collateral consequences, which derails lives and destroys earning potential. Convictions can result in denial of student financial aid, housing, employment, and professional licenses.

Decriminalization saves tax-funded resources for serious crime.

- Criminalizing simple marijuana possession forces law enforcement to spend valuable time arresting, processing, and prosecuting non-violent offenders.
- This time could be better-spent preventing crimes with community policing and solving violent and property crimes.

Virginians want reduced penalties.

- Polling shows 83 percent of Virginians support decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of marijuana, making it punishable by a fine rather than jail. [\[3\]](#)

Other states have successfully reduced penalties.

- Twenty-six states — including Maryland and North Carolina — have stopped jailing their residents for possessing small amounts of marijuana. In 11 of those states and D.C., marijuana has been legalized for adults' use.
- Many of the decriminalization laws have been in place since the 1970s. They have been so non-controversial that even many people living in the states are unaware of them.

Marijuana is safer than alcohol; possession should not be criminalized.

- Marijuana is less toxic, less addictive, and less harmful to the body than alcohol.
- Individuals should not be criminalized for choosing to use the safer substance.

[\[1\] https://www.vsp.virginia.gov/downloads/Crime_in_Virginia/Crime_in_Virginia_2018.pdf](https://www.vsp.virginia.gov/downloads/Crime_in_Virginia/Crime_in_Virginia_2018.pdf)

[\[2\] https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/aclu-thewaronmarijuana-rel2.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/aclu-thewaronmarijuana-rel2.pdf)

[\[3\] http://cnu.edu/wasoncenter/surveys/2019-12-16/](http://cnu.edu/wasoncenter/surveys/2019-12-16/)