



Regulation Works! It's Time for a New Approach to Cannabis Policy in New Jersey

Cannabis prohibition is a costly failure. New Jersey arrests more people for cannabis than almost any other state — with 37,623 arrests in 2017, one arrest every 14 minutes. Yet despite prohibiting cannabis since 1933, and punishing cannabis possession with up to six months in jail, New Jersey has not eliminated cannabis use. In fact, 12% of New Jersey adults admitted consuming cannabis within the last year on a recent federal survey.

Taxing and regulating cannabis will dramatically reduce arrests and invasive searches, which disproportionately impact African Americans. Black New Jerseyans are three times as likely to be arrested for cannabis as whites, despite similar usage rates. While legalization does not fix the unequal enforcement that plagues our criminal justice system, it reduces the number of arrests among all races and has significantly reduced disparities in traffic searches.

Decriminalization alone is not enough. While decriminalization reduces arrests, it does not solve the problem of where the cannabis comes from. The question is not whether people should consume cannabis — they are already doing so — but whether they should buy it from law-abiding businesses or from the illicit market.

Regulation works. As Gov. Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson of Washington explained, “Our state’s efforts to regulate the sale of marijuana are succeeding. A few years ago, the illegal trafficking of marijuana lined the pockets of criminals everywhere. Now, in our state, illegal trafficking activity is being displaced by a closely regulated marijuana industry that pays hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes. This frees up significant law enforcement resources to protect our communities in other, more pressing ways.”

Cannabis is safer than alcohol. The Institute of Medicine found cannabis to be far less addictive than alcohol or tobacco. Unlike alcohol, there are no documented fatal overdoses from cannabis. And unlike tobacco, smoking cannabis alone is not associated with an increased risk of lung or other cancers. Adults should be able to make the safer choice.

Taxing and regulating cannabis boosts the economy. The cannabis industry will create thousands of good, middle-class jobs in local communities in New Jersey. Colorado has more than 41,000 people actively licensed to handle cannabis, plus many more in related fields. In 2015 in Colorado, the industry generated \$2.4 billion in economic activity.

Legalizing and regulating cannabis benefits public health and safety:

- **It can reduce violence:** As with alcohol prohibition in the 1920s, since drug-related disputes can’t be solved lawfully, violence is inevitable. As a result, cannabis consumers and sellers face dangers due to prohibition.
- **It will protect the environment, workers, and consumers:** Prohibition deprives workers and the environment of legal protections they need. It guarantees cannabis won’t undergo quality control testing, resulting in possible contamination by pesticides, molds, and dangerous additives. Regulated retailers can only sell lab-tested products that are labeled with their

potency.

- **It will stop diverting police time away from serious crime and improve police/community relationships:** A Department of Justice study found that trusting relationships with the local community was one of the most important factors in whether police were effective in solving violent crimes. As Washington, D.C.'s former police chief put it: "all these [marijuana] arrests do is make people hate us."

Sixty-two percent of New Jerseyans agree: it's time to legalize and regulate cannabis!