



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: July 26th, 2022

Re: Cannabis Administration Opportunity Act

Position: SUPPORT

To: US Senate Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism

Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee,

I am Chief Edward Jackson, and I currently serve the city of Annapolis as their Chief of Police. Prior to my service in Annapolis, I served for over twenty-one years with the Baltimore Police Department, where I began as a patrolman and earned the rank of Colonel before retirement and subsequently returning to serve as Chief of the Office the Inspector General, tasked with increasing accountability for police officers and improving police-community relations. I participated in over 500 investigations, including narcotics and distribution crimes.

As a law enforcement professional with more than two decades of experience, I have spent far too much time arresting people for selling and possessing cannabis when the reason I became a police officer was to make my community safer. After seeing the true cost of enforcing cannabis laws, I believe that it is time to end federal cannabis prohibition by passing the Cannabis Administration Opportunity Act.

I am a member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, which is a non-profit organization of over 250 police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who advocate for improving the justice system. Our mission is to unite and mobilize the voice of law enforcement in support of drug policy and criminal justice reforms that will make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest

threats to public safety, promoting alternatives to arrest and incarceration, addressing the root causes of crime, and working toward healing police-community relations. LEAP supports the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act because we believe it will improve public safety and help heal police-community relations.

Around the country, people—including police—are realizing that there is nothing inherently violent about selling, possessing, or using cannabis; prohibition is what fuels violence and crime, not cannabis. Just as alcohol prohibition funded Al Capone, today's cannabis prohibition funnels millions of dollars to street gangs and

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cartels, who use violence to protect their profits. Prohibition is what fuels violence and illegal activity, not cannabis. That is a big part of why moving cannabis from the illegal market to the legal market will improve public safety. In states where cannabis is legal, it is sold by licensed dispensaries that ensure the safety of their product, pay taxes, and check the age and IDs of potential buyers. Prohibition fuels illegal activity, not cannabis.

Fortunately, the United States Senate has an opportunity to address this tragic and unnecessary violence by ending federal cannabis prohibition with the Cannabis Administration Opportunity Act, which would remove cannabis from the federal list of controlled substances. Critically, the Act would also help our police refocus our efforts on higher priorities than cannabis.

This problem hit me as a sergeant in West Baltimore. We were pulling over drivers randomly, making them late to work, when we heard gunshots. While we were on a useless fishing expedition, someone was shot two blocks away. Yet today, FBI [Uniform Crime Reports](#) reveal that more people continue to be arrested for cannabis than for all violent crimes put together. Every hour, our patrol officers and drug squads arrest another young person for a nonviolent cannabis offense. And these officers quickly learn that arrests do not keep cannabis off the street. Often, before the arresting officer has finished filling out paperwork, a new young person has filled that spot. Instead, prohibition perpetuates a vicious cycle of people coming in and going out of our justice system. A criminal conviction or arrest shuts people out of the legal job market and pushes them to the margins of society because of the barriers we erect for people with criminal records.

In addition, I believe that passing the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act would help improve police-community trust. After decades of the War on Drugs, police-community trust has become the weakest link in our ability to ensure public safety. In 2015, city officials in Baltimore wanted enhanced drug policing in the Gilmore Homes. Officers encountered a young man named Freddie Gray, arrested him, and he died in police custody. Public fury over Freddie Gray's death brought my beloved city to a boiling point. Since this tragedy, community trust in police and clearance rates are at historic lows, and homicide has spiked. With more than 600,000 cannabis-related arrests every year in the US, we have taught millions of families not to open their doors to the police. Anyone who has knocked on doors in a police uniform knows that community trust is our strongest weapon in solving crime. Homicide detectives need neighbors to open their doors and share information in order for us to solve cases. Ending the federal prohibition will improve police-community trust because officers will no longer arrest individuals for low-level nonviolent marijuana offenses and instead focus their attention on violence in our communities.

All these impacts of cannabis prohibition have fallen particularly hard on communities of color because cannabis laws are only enforced in certain neighborhoods. A 2020 [report](#) found that Black Americans are nearly 4 times more likely to be arrested for cannabis possession than white Americans, even though both groups use cannabis at roughly the same rates.

The Cannabis Administration Opportunity Act would address this stain on our history and help rebuild the trust that has been lost. It contains provisions that would expunge the criminal records of those with low-level cannabis offenses and give them an opportunity to have a fresh start without the blemish of a criminal record.

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Finally, I want to address the false claim that cannabis leads people to use other drugs like heroin. Cannabis isn't any more of a gateway drug than alcohol. People who are looking for a painkiller or an escape will try different drugs; there's nothing special about cannabis that makes people try more addictive drugs. Cannabis prohibition is only a gateway to the justice system.

For all of these reasons, I implore you to legalize cannabis on the federal level by passing the Cannabis Administration Opportunity Act. This Act will reduce cannabis-related violence against officers and community members alike. It will stop wasting officer time on cannabis arrests that create lifelong criminal records. It will help restore community trust in police departments across the United States and align federal law with the views of [two-thirds of Americans](#). Finally, it will help right the wrongs of the decades-long war on cannabis, which has pushed police to treat Black and Brown Americans as our enemies rather than those we are sworn to protect and serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for considering this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Chief Edward Jackson
Annapolis Police Department
Law Enforcement Action Partnership