

February 2, 2023

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am writing today to express my strong support for SB 51. When I was a college student at the University of Maryland, my life was forever changed by a traumatic arrest and search of my dorm room, solely based on the odor of cannabis.

I was a 19-year-old freshman, and was smoking a joint in my dorm room with a friend when we heard a knock at the door. I answered and two police officers barged in and started to berate me. I complied immediately and gave them the 0.5 grams of cannabis that I had. They proceeded to tear my room apart, dumping all my belongings on the floor, while I cried. I had a panic disorder, and briefly fainted. I woke up handcuffed to a chair while they continued searching my room. When they were finished searching, the female officer searched my body and instructed me to put on underwear since they were taking me to the police station. I asked if the male officer could leave while I changed, she said no and kicked the door closed, and forced me to change in view of the male officer. They marched me out of the dorm, pressed my face onto the police car then shoved me inside. At the police station, I was put into shackles around my ankles, waist, and wrists. Officers there laughed and made fun of how upset I was. I spent the night in a cell with someone experiencing some kind of mental health crisis and was released on my own reconnaissance the next day. Not having a phone or any money with me, I was forced to walk about a mile back to campus, in my pajamas, in January. The charges were eventually dropped.

The search was initiated because residence hall policy at the time mandated that residence hall staff were to call the police if they smelled the odor of marijuana. The experience was deeply traumatizing and inspired me to become an activist for drug policy reform.

It was unnecessary to involve police in such a minor situation, and I'm lucky I didn't suffer more serious psychological or physical harm as so many have at the hands of police. I will never forget how I was treated like an animal, and it has forever shaped my inability to see police as people there to protect me.

I urge you to pass this law and end the indignity of invasive and unnecessary searches due simply to the odor of cannabis.

Anastacia Wallis