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Submitted to:

Maryland House of Delegates, Judiciary Committee, Annapolis, MD
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Testimony from the Maryland State Chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of
Marijuana Laws (NORML)

In Regard to:

HB0550 (Criminal Law - Marijuana - Possession and Possession With Intent to Distribute)

Stop creating records we will have to expunge later anyway!

Maryland NORML has no paid staff – we are entirely energized by more than 5,000 Maryland citizens committed to ending marijuana prohibition and establishing a regulated cannabis commercial market for adults who choose to use marijuana responsibly. We submit this testimony on behalf of our membership, their families, and other Marylanders who want to see harm reduction policies that will establish a more just and inclusive society.

HB0550 is an important step toward dismantling institutional racism.

Marijuana possession and “possession with intent to distribute” laws are enforced in a racially discriminatory way across the state and results in more than 18,000 marijuana possession arrests a year in Maryland. As the General Assembly works to establish an "automatic" marijuana arrest record expungement process, HB0550 should be a 2020 priority for the Maryland General Assembly!

Expanding the decriminalization of low-level marijuana offenses allows police and the courts to re-prioritize their resources toward addressing more serious crimes. Minor marijuana possession offenders, many of them young people, should not be saddled with a criminal record and the lifelong penalties and stigma associated with it.

Our current law enforcement approach makes every arrest a life sentence. Criminal records associated with marijuana possession plague individuals throughout the remainder of their life. In addition to barriers on employment, housing, education, parental rights, marijuana possession arrest records restrict access to more lenient and restorative reentry programs and other essential services and personal freedoms.



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The harmful legacy of these records also undermines our sense of hope for redemption. Diverting our people into the justice system destroys our confidence that the instruments of government are intended to lift us up; it makes us distrustful of public institutions and the people vested with authority over certain aspects of our life here in the “free state.”

The harmful impact of these low-level marijuana arrest records damages the individual, their family, and the entire society for no apparent public interest. Data show that children raised by adults with criminal records face real challenges - negative consequences are found in the children’s cognitive development, school performance, and employment outcomes in their adulthood. (See “Removing Barriers to Opportunity for Parents With Criminal Records and Their Children: A Two-Generation Approach” Washington Center for American Progress, 2015)

For these reasons, I urge you to please support HB0550.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Luke Jones, Maryland NORML

cc:

Adrienne Jones, House Speaker