

Jan 29, 2020

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Please hear my testimony in favor of House Bill 488, Use or Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance – De Minimis Quantity.

It is clear to me that this country has a racism problem, and some of the clearest examples of this problem are the policies of the failed War on Drugs.

These policies were begun by President Nixon with the Controlled Substances act. As we have learned from Nixon's advisor John Erlichmann, that Act was created for partisan political reasons: "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people," Ehrlichman told the journalist Dan Baum. "You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities."

More racist Drug War policies came later, such as the sentencing disparities between crack cocaine, used more frequently by urban African-Americans, and powdered cocaine, used more by whites. This disparity in sentencing continues to this day.

Currently, there are higher arrest and incarceration rates for People of Color than for whites, and this is not due to higher rates of drug use, but instead to over-policing of these populations. The result is an over-representation of People of Color in our jails, and a decimation of their communities.

Maryland is no exception to these unjust trends. Fortunately, House Bill 488 would do much to alleviate the burden on communities in our state. Passing this bill will move Maryland toward righting these historic and persistent wrongs. Please give it your full support.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Zach Larson-Rabin', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Zach Larson-Rabin, Ph.D.

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