



Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

Maryland (2022): HB 1 & HB 837, Testimony in support of cannabis legalization and regulation efforts

My name is Jax James and I serve as the State Policy Manager for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). I would like to thank the Senate Finance Committee for considering House Bill 837. NORML is supportive of legislative efforts to give voters the opportunity to declare their position regarding important public health legislation such as cannabis policy reform, and is supportive of the establishment of a state-sanctioned, regulated cannabis market. However, our mission first and foremost prioritizes the safety and protection of consumers, and thus we outline various suggested amendments below.

The Maryland Cannabis Reform bill (HB 837) is intended to define what a legal system would look like if the cannabis legalization referendum bill (HB 1) becomes law and voters favor legalization in November. This legislation provides voters with the opportunity to decide whether or not to legalize adult-use marijuana possession in Maryland and also provides a framework for the adoption of a regulated marketplace in a fair and equitable manner.

HB 1 would finally allow voters to have their say on this important issue. HB 837 provides some guidance with respect to what activities would and would not be permissible after legalization. Specifically, when it comes to providing a regulatory framework for a fair and just adult-use legalization scheme, we believe that lawmakers consider making the following changes and/or clarifications to this bill:

Legalization should go into effect immediately upon voter approval

Adult-use possession and home cultivation would not be legalized until July 2023 — eight months after voter approval. There should not be a delay between voter approval and ending penalties and police intervention for cannabis possession.

Legalize safe home production of cannabis products, effective upon voter approval

Adults should be able to safely make cannabis-infused products (such as brownies) at home. HB 837 imposes up to three years in jail for home production of cannabis products.

Clarify and increase possession and cultivation limits





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We suggest legalizing personal cultivation of up to six plants, rather than two, which is more in line with other states, along with all of the cannabis produced by the plants, as long as any excess cannabis is kept at home .

We also recommend allowing personal possession of four ounces to mirror the medical law. Having consistency in the possession limits between adult -use and medical cannabis will protect patients, who may not have their card on them or have an expired card.

Express a commitment to repair the damages caused by unjust and racist marijuana prohibition laws.

The regulated marijuana industry cannot be successful without actively working to repair the harms caused by the failed war on drugs .

According to the 2020 Maryland Uniform Crime Report, the illegal status of marijuana accounts for 57 percent of all drug related arrests in the state (11,508 marijuana arrests in 2020). These arrest statistics are shocking, but they do not account for the tens -of-thousands of unnecessary, avoidable encounters cannabis consumers have with police on a daily basis that do not lead to an arrest. The harms that result from these encounters are real, measurable, and disproportionately affect communities of color .

Reforming how citizens engage with police and restoring confidence in public institutions requires immediate cannabis policy reform action. Adult -use marijuana legalization has broad, bipartisan support and we urge you to help us assure these prohibition -era laws are repealed this legislative session. Over 60 percent of Maryland residents endorse a regulated, adult -use marijuana market. They deserve the opportunity to democratically enact long overdue change through legislative action.

For these reasons, NORML urges Maryland lawmakers to thoughtfully consider and pass HB 1 and HB 837 with amendments .

