



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

121 Mystic Avenue, Suite 9
Medford, Massachusetts 02155
(781) 393.6985

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lieutenant Diane Goldstein, Ret.
Nevada, USA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Deputy Chief Wayne Harris, Ret.
Chair, New York, USA

Major Neill Franklin, Ret.
Treasurer, Florida, USA

Professor Jody Armour
Secretary, California, USA

Sergeant Terry Blevins, Fmr.
California, USA

Chief Mike Butler, Ret.
Colorado, USA

Ms. Nadine Jones
New Jersey, USA

Captain Leigh Maddox, Ret.
Maryland, USA

Captain Sonia Y.W. Pruitt, Ret.
Maryland, USA

Superintendent Richard N. Van Wickler, Ret.
New Hampshire, USA

Detective Sergeant Neil Woods, Ret.
Derbyshire, England, LEAP UK

Date: March 3rd, 2022

Re: SB 692: Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 692 today. Having spent the bulk of my career with the Baltimore Police Department, working as a detective with the Criminal Investigation Drug Enforcement Section, I believe I have a responsibility to offer my support for this bill. SB 692 legalizes the use and possession of a certain amount of cannabis by adults over the age of 21. It also clears criminal records and the disposition of certain charges relating to the use and possession of cannabis. Finally, the bill establishes a system for the regulation and taxation of the market for the production and sale of cannabis in the State.

In addition to my public safety career, I am a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and working toward healing police-community relations.

As a veteran drug enforcement detective, I was dismayed to see scarce police resources spent on cannabis arrests. Every cannabis arrest took hours away from investigating homicides and attempted murders. We need our police to focus on the greatest threats to public safety -- and cannabis is not one of them.

In fact, I learned the hard way that arresting someone for selling cannabis makes things worse on the street. Every officer knows that an arrest does not stop the cannabis trade. Instead, it introduces more people into the justice system, where a criminal record will lock them out of employment, education, and housing opportunities.

LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org

Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

After retiring from policing, I founded the “Out of School Time” violence prevention program in West Baltimore, which engages kids in after-school activities to keep them off the street corner. Programs like ours pay huge long-term dividends in keeping kids on a positive path. But our progress is threatened every day by job offers from the illegal marijuana market.

Keeping the use and possession of certain amounts of cannabis illegal not only wastes the time of our officers, it also destroys community trust. You already know how Freddie Gray’s death led to the devastating 2015 uprising -- one of the greatest implosions in police-community relations since Rodney King. Freddie Gray had been in and out of handcuffs since age eighteen for selling drugs. We cannot place all of the blame on the officers who killed him -- when we ask officers to fight a war against drugs, some officers are going to treat those that possess cannabis as combatants rather than as neighbors and members of the community.

Some individuals believe that cannabis prohibition is useful so that officers have an excuse to threaten people with arrest if they do not cooperate. These same individuals wonder why many communities of color do not trust the police. Every time an officer threatens a community member with a cannabis arrest, we are digging ourselves deeper into this hole of distrust.

It has long been argued that legalizing cannabis would promote and encourage more usage. The truth is that it is already widely available and it does not necessarily encourage more usage. According to a study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association, there was no increase in usage in states where cannabis has been legalized.

Without community trust, police cannot protect public safety. Since the killing of Freddie Gray in April 2015, homicide rates in Baltimore have been sky-high. When people do not trust the police, our detectives cannot close cases. We must protect police-community trust as one of our most valuable public safety resources, and our War on Drugs is front and center in destroying that trust.

We are at a critical time for our state and nation. We need to do more to gain back the trust of the communities we took an oath to protect and serve. I believe that SB 692 is an important step forward to restore trust, improve public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in support of this bill.

Detective Debbie Ramsey (Ret.)
Baltimore Police Department, Maryland
Baltimore, MD