



Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

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## Maryland (2022): SB 692, Testimony in support of legislation to establish a regulated, adult-use cannabis market

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 Senate Bill 692. NORML is supportive of legislative efforts to protect cannabis consumers from an unregulated cannabis market.

Senate Bill 692, also known as the Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act, seeks to legalize the limited use and possession of cannabis by individuals aged 21 years and older. If passed, the bill would also provide for the clearing of criminal records and disposition of certain charges relating to the use and possession of cannabis and establish a regulatory framework and market taxation system for the production and sale of cannabis in the state.

Never in modern history has there existed greater public support for repealing the nation's nearly century-long experiment with marijuana prohibition. According to statewide polling data, 60 percent of Maryland residents endorse regulating the adult use of marijuana.

Licensing the commercial marijuana marketplace will bring long overdue controls to this market. Voters do not desire replacing nearly a century of criminalization with a marijuana free-for-all. They are aware of the reality that marijuana possesses some potential level of risk and that there exists the potential for abuse, particularly among young people. In fact, it is precisely because of this reality that NORML believes that society ought to regulate its use, production, and dispensing accordingly. By contrast, we believe that advocating for the plant's continued criminalization and for the proliferation of the black market does nothing to offset these risks; it compounds them.

This is because marijuana prohibition drives markets underground and abdicates control of these markets to those who typically operate outside the boundaries of law. Regulation, by contrast, allows for lawmakers to establish legal parameters regarding where, when, and how an adult cannabis market may operate. Legalization also provides oversight regarding who may legally operate in said markets and provides guidelines so that those who do can engage in best practices.





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Such regulations already exist for alcohol and tobacco – two substances that are far more dangerous and costly to society than is the adult use of cannabis. The imposition and enforcement of tobacco and alcohol regulations, coupled with public awareness campaigns highlighting these products' risks and acknowledging the distinctions between their use versus abuse, has proven effective at reducing the public's overall consumption of these substances, especially among teens.

Unfortunately, a legal environment in which marijuana is criminalized is not conducive to imposing such common sense, evidence-based practices. A pragmatic regulatory framework that allows for the legal, licensed production and retail sale of cannabis to adults, but restricts and discourages its use among young people best reduces the risks associated with the plant's use or abuse, and provides an environment whereby consumers can best learn the skills and knowledge to readily delineate between the two behaviors.

Passage of this legislation will also make it so that minor offenders are no longer stigmatized and disenfranchised by the collateral consequences of an arrest record for an incident that is no longer a crime. People with otherwise clean records do not deserve for the rest of their life to be derailed because of an erroneous marijuana conviction that would not have been prosecuted today.

It's time to stop ceding control and revenue of the marijuana market to unregulated and untaxed enterprises. A pragmatic regulatory framework that licenses production and sale of marijuana to adults—but continues to criminalize sale to minors—best reduces the risks associated with its use and commerce.

NORML urges Maryland lawmakers to thoughtfully consider SB 692 to ensure a safe and regulated cannabis market for responsible adult consumers.

