

New Solutions Campaign

Promoting Fair & Effective Criminal Justice • Strengthening Families & Communities

The Serious Long-Term Consequences of a Marijuana Conviction

Instead of improving the safety of our communities, our marijuana laws make criminals out of millions of otherwise law-abiding people and impose a lifetime of punishment on those who are convicted. A marijuana conviction subjects an individual to a system of legal discrimination that makes it difficult or impossible to secure employment, housing, student loans, or even a driver's license. Even without a conviction, the collateral consequences of an arrest can include untold stigma and humiliation, the unmanageable financial burden of a criminal court proceeding and lost hours at work or school.

Employment

Employers routinely use information about previous criminal arrests and convictions to deny job applicants, regardless of whether the applicant has superior qualifications or the offense is related to the position in question. A criminal record also has permanent effects on income levels, even for individuals lucky enough to find work. People with criminal records earn 30 to 40 percent less over their lifetimes than those without.

Education

Federal law temporarily bars a student convicted of marijuana possession for the first or second time from receiving government-funded financial aid for higher education. A third offense triggers a permanent disqualification. This means that the most vulnerable young people, those most dependent on student loans, are more likely to become educational outsiders and consequently be subject to diminished employment opportunities and limited earning potential for the rest of their lives. And this, in turn, perpetuates disadvantage in our most vulnerable communities.

Marijuana Laws Disproportionately Impact Communities of Color

The debilitating costs of marijuana arrests and convictions are even more harmful when considered in light of their disparate racial impact. In New Jersey, African Americans are three times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession as whites, despite similar usage rates across races. Marijuana laws have been used to support biased policies like stop and frisk, racial profiling and the deportation of people of color.

The Time Has Come for Responsible, Common-Sense Reform

It is time to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana like alcohol for adults. This will create a safe and controlled system with many social and economic benefits. Otherwise law-abiding adults will not be turned into criminals and racial disparities and harms will decline. Resources that are currently wasted on marijuana prohibition will be freed to focus on projects and programs that support and strengthen our families and communities.

Sponsored by

Drug Policy Alliance | 16 West Front Street, Suite 101A, Trenton, NJ 08608
nj@drugpolicy.org | 609.396.8613 voice | 609.396.9478 fax | @DrugPolicy_NJ

