



July Newsletter

On 50th Anniversary of Drug War, Federal Bill Introduced to Decriminalize Drug Possession

June 17 marked 50 years since President Nixon infamously declared that drug abuse was “public enemy number one.” This proclamation marked the start of a full out offensive that has pumped hundreds of billions of dollars into law enforcement, fueled hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths, and led to the over-surveillance and incarceration of millions of people – disproportionately Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people.

On the same day, Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO) introduced the Drug Policy Reform Act in the U.S. House of Representatives. DPA has been a strategic partner in the development of the legislation.

The bill would end criminal penalties for drug possession at the federal level, shift the regulatory authority from the Attorney General to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, expunge records and provide for resentencing, and reinvest in alternative health-centered approaches. The bill also eliminates many of the life-long consequences associated with drug arrests and convictions, including the denial of employment, public benefits, immigration status, drivers’ licenses, and voting rights.

“Every 23 seconds, a person’s life is ruined for simply possessing drugs. Drug possession remains the most arrested offense in the United States despite the well-known fact that drug criminalization does nothing to help communities, it ruins them. It tears families apart, and causes trauma that can be felt for generations. The drug war has caused mass devastation to Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and low-income communities and today we say, ‘Enough is enough!’” said [Queen Adesuyi](#), policy manager for DPA’s Office of National Affairs.

Ahead of the bill’s introduction, DPA and the American Civil Liberties Union in [released a poll](#) on the public’s perception of the drug war. Results showed that the vast majority of American voters believe the policy has been a failure that has only increased drug-related harms and contributed to overcrowding the nation’s jails and

prisons.

A staggering 83% of respondents said that the war on drugs has failed, including 83% of Democrats, 85% of Independents, and 82% of Republicans. Nearly two-thirds of respondents also said that we need a new approach to drugs based in public health, not law enforcement.

“The Drug Policy Reform Act gives us a way out,” Queen Adesuyi continued. “It’s a chance to reimagine what the next 50 years can be. It allows us to offer people support instead of punishment. And it gives people who have been harmed by these draconian laws a chance to move forward and embrace some semblance of the life they have long been denied.”

[Learn more about the bill](#)

DPA’s Executive Director Testifies in Congress

Kassandra Frederique, DPA’s executive director, appeared before the House Committee on the Judiciary’s Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security on June 17 to testify at their hearing entitled “Undoing the Damage of the War on Drugs: A Renewed Call for Sentencing Reform.”

In Frederique’s **impassioned testimony**, she denounced the drug war for having achieved no meaningful reduction in drug harms or overdoses, and said it has instead “exacerbated the dangers of illicit markets and prevented the implementation of robust harm reduction systems, driving people who need and want help further from the public health resources.”

Frederique called on Congress to reduce sentences for all drug offenses, repeal mandatory minimum sentences, and invest in a public health approach to drug use.

Watch Kassandra Frederique’s full testimony.

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: THE REAL ENEMY IS THE DRUG WAR



Fifty years ago, President Nixon declared a war on drugs, describing drug abuse as "public enemy number one" in the United States. In this new three-minute video, DPA's executive director, [Kassandra Frederique](#), declares that the real enemy is the drug war itself, and describes how we will end it.

[Watch the full video on YouTube.](#)

[Subscribe to DPA's YouTube channel.](#)

DPA's Emily Kaltenbach Talks New Mexico Marijuana Policy as Legalization Takes Effect

[Emily Kaltenbach](#), DPA's senior director of resident states and New Mexico, joined Ben Lewinger, executive director of the state's Cannabis Chamber of Commerce, on [Voice of the Public](#) to discuss marijuana legalization in New Mexico.

In March, New Mexico lawmakers passed the Cannabis Regulation Act and the Expungement of Certain Criminal Records Act, legalizing marijuana for

adult use and beginning to repair the harms of prohibition. DPA, which had been advocating for years at the state legislature for passage of legalization, was instrumental in the bills' success.

The Cannabis Regulation Act [took effect on Tuesday](#), officially legalizing possession and home cultivation in the state.

[*Listen to the discussion.*](#)

LA City Council Joins Senator Wiener in Support of Overdose Prevention Programs

The Los Angeles City Council has joined California State Senator Scott Wiener in supporting SB 57, a bill to bring overdose prevention programs - sometimes called supervised consumption sites - to California.

DPA, along with other co-sponsoring organizations, launched a vigorous legislative campaign last year to pilot overdose prevention programs in San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles County, where the homeless crisis continues to grow, overdose rates have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and fentanyl-related deaths are surging.

SB 57 will focus on the urgent need for these life-saving programs in the wake of the nation's growing overdose crisis, which kills more people than traffic accidents, homicides, and suicides combined.

"With overdose deaths up nearly 50% during the first five months of the pandemic and now the fourth leading cause of death in LA County, it is more urgent than ever before that we use every resource available to save lives. And that is exactly the commitment the LA City Council has shown today by supporting this resolution," said **Jeannette Zanipatin**, state director of DPA's California office.

"Overdose prevention programs provide an evidence-based, cost-effective approach for us to save lives now, prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and connect people with other vitally important services - such as treatment, housing, and other healthcare resources - which have been shown to improve health outcomes in the long-term."

[***Learn more.***](#)

Drug Policy in the News

The Grio: The War on Drugs At 50 Demands Reparations for Black People

Los Angeles Daily News: LA City Council Supports State Bill to Legalize Safer Consumption Sites

USA Today: Connecticut Legalizes Recreational Marijuana

MSNBC: Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman Introduces New House Bill Decriminalizing Drug Possession

New York Daily News: The War on Drugs Is A Half-Century-Long Mistake with Massive Casualties

Next City: 'Safety First' Drug Education Program Acknowledges the Failings of 'Just Say No'

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