March Newsletter

Uprooting the Drug War: DPA Launches New Initiative Exploring How the Drug War Has Contaminated Six Critical Systems

DPA has launched a major new initiative: Uprooting the Drug War. The project includes a series of reports and an interactive website that aim to expose the impact of the war on drugs beyond arrest and incarceration. It is designed to engage activists across sectors in understanding and dismantling the ways in which the war on drugs has infiltrated and shaped many other systems people encounter in their daily lives – including education, employment, housing, child welfare, immigration, and public benefits.

“Even as there is growing momentum for treating drug use as a matter of personal and public health, the systems on which we would normally rely to advance an alternative approach are infested with the same culture of punishment as the criminal legal system and have operated with relative impunity,” said Cassandra Frederique, DPA’s executive director. “Through the Uprooting the Drug War project, we are exposing those systems and their role in fueling drug war policies and logic that compound the harms suffered by people who use drugs and people who are targeted by drug war enforcement.”

The goal of the new initiative – a natural extension of DPA’s work to decriminalize drug use and possession – is to collaborate with aligned movements and legislators through meetings, webinars, convenings, and organizing to explore the ways the drug war has infected the systems and institutions that are at the core of their policy advocacy and create momentum for concrete policy proposals that begin to end the drug war in all its forms.

The first webinar in the Uprooting the Drug War discussion series – Child Welfare, the Drug War, and Family Separation – will be held on March 31. Register here to attend the webinar.
Washington State Supreme Court Declares State’s Drug Possession Statute Unconstitutional

Last week, the Washington State Supreme Court threw out the state’s simple drug possession statute, finding that it violated the state and federal constitutions.

As Oregon begins implementing its voter-approved drug decriminalization initiative and the Washington legislature considers a similar reform, the Court took a fresh look at the state’s possession statute, which made it a felony to unlawfully possess any amount of controlled substances other than marijuana. The law did not require evidence of "knowledge and intent" for people to be criminally liable for possession. Simply being found to possess illegal drugs could be enough for a conviction, even without proof that the person knew about the presence of the substance.

“As a result of the Washington Supreme Court’s decision, police currently have no basis for detaining an individual or initiating an investigation based solely on drug possession. Prosecutors have already announced plans to dismiss pending cases. And the ruling is also likely to result in procedures to throw out prior convictions under the flawed statute,” said Grey Gardner, senior staff attorney for DPA.

“However, the state’s response to this decision remains to be seen. The legislature could amend the old drug possession statute to explicitly require intent, returning the state to drug war ‘business as usual.’”

“A smarter approach would be to proactively codify decriminalization and health-based alternatives in state law. Washington has the opportunity to build alternatives that promote health and wellbeing, including harm reduction, evidence-based drug treatment, mental health care, and housing. DPA urges Washington to follow Oregon’s lead and stop treating drug use as a criminal problem, and instead shift to a health approach.”

Learn more.

New Mexico House of Representatives Passes Marijuana
Legalization Bill that Centers Social Justice

The New Mexico House of Representatives has approved a bill to legalize marijuana in the state.

The legislation, which was approved in a 39-31 vote, would allow adults 21 and older to possess “at least” two ounces of marijuana and grow up to six mature and six immature plants for personal use. The measure would also prioritize using tax revenue from marijuana sales to support reinvestments in communities most impacted by the war on drugs, and includes provisions to automatically expunge prior marijuana convictions.

“Marijuana legalization in New Mexico is one step closer to the finish line. After today’s debate, we’re even more optimistic that this bill has a path to the Governor’s desk,” said Emily Kaltenbach, DPA’s senior director for resident states and New Mexico.

“Given HB 12 puts the lives of New Mexicans ahead of solely business interests, it is critical it be the vehicle for legalization as the issue moves forward. HB 12 legalizes marijuana in an equitable way that begins to repair the harms that have disproportionately impacted Hispanic/Latinx, Black, Native, and Indigenous people in New Mexico.

“New Mexicans are absolutely ready to see marijuana legalization become a reality in the state, but they have made it clear that repairing the damage done by the drug war is non-negotiable.”

Nearly three out of four New Mexicans approve of marijuana legalization with provisions in place to ensure tax revenue is reinvested back into communities, including 94% of Democrats, 93% of Independents, and 46% of Republicans.

Learn more.

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: How Much Do You Know About Drug Laws?
How much do you know about our drug laws? Test your knowledge on the impact of the drug war by taking our quiz.

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March Is Women's History Month

We can't talk about women's history without acknowledging the insidious ways the drug war has targeted women, particularly women of color.

Women are now a fast-growing segment of the U.S. prison population, largely because of draconian drug laws. More than 61% of women doing time in federal prison are behind bars for drug offenses.

Women are routinely separated from their children for supposed drug use. They are disproportionately affected by social stigma, by a plea-bargaining system that punishes those unable or unwilling to inform on others, by regulations that bar people with a drug conviction from obtaining (or that require a drug test to receive) public assistance, and by a drug treatment system designed for men. And that's just the start of how women are uniquely harmed by the drug war.

At the same time, women are leading the movement for evidence-based drug policy reform across the country. DPA, under the leadership of executive director Kassandra Frederique and an all-women senior management team, was recently lauded by Elle magazine for our role in...
passing Measure 110 in Oregon – which decriminalized all drugs.

*Learn more about women and the drug war.*

**DPA Is Hiring: Managing Director of Communications and Director of Finance and Accounting**

DPA has two openings: managing director of communications and director of finance and accounting. These positions will help lead the organization, and the drug policy reform movement, at this crucial time.

The managing director of communications will work closely with the executive director, building on the organization’s history and using that momentum to be even more forward thinking, galvanizing, and rigorous. This position will craft the organization’s communications strategy, marketing, public voice and messaging, media relations, brand management, and communications with key stakeholders. Find out more about this position here.

The director of finance and accounting is responsible for the overall financial health and stability of DPA’s funds. Reporting to the chief operating officer, the director manages the organization’s strategic financial and accounting goals, continuously improves fiscal operations, and conducts ongoing risk assessments. This person also educates and supports senior staff in formulating strategic yearly budgets that strengthen program operations. Find out more about this position here.

DPA is an equal opportunity employer. We value a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture. We encourage applications from all qualified individuals without regard to race, color, religion, gender, ethnicity, personal appearance, political affiliation, family responsibility, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, national origin, marital status, citizenship, disability, veteran status, and record of arrest or conviction. We are particularly interested in hiring people who have been adversely affected by the war on drugs.
Drug Policy in the News

**Elle:** Oregon Is the First State to Decriminalize All Drugs. These Women Helped Make It Happen.

**Filter:** Washington Court Decriminalizes Drugs: Will Lawmakers Let It Stand?

**Wall Street Journal:** Advocates Back Legislative Effort to Legalize Marijuana in New York

**Tennessee Tribune:** It's Time for a War on the Drug War

**Marijuana Moment:** Top Washington, D.C. Lawmaker Files Competing Legal Marijuana Bill Days After Mayor Unveils Her Plan

**Leafly:** Joe Biden Thinks ‘Forced Rehab’ Is Positive Drug Reform. Here’s Why He’s Wrong

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