November Newsletter

Drug Policy Wins Big!

“Tuesday was a monumental night for drug policy reform. In arguably the biggest blow to the drug war to date, Oregon became the first state in the nation to decriminalize all drugs. And it was a historic night for marijuana reform too, with New Jersey, Montana, South Dakota, and Arizona legalizing marijuana for adult use, and Mississippi and South Dakota legalizing medical marijuana.

We could not have made all this incredible progress without you – our supporters. Thank you for being a part of this movement. We know that our fight for justice will not always be as decisive, but we are energized and emboldened by these victories. And I truly believe we have the people, the votes, and justice on our side.”

– Kassandra Frederique, Executive Director, Drug Policy Alliance

Oregon Becomes First State to Decriminalize All Drugs

In a historic victory, Oregon voters approved Measure 110, the nation’s first measure to end criminal penalties for the personal possession of drugs. It is a landmark declaration that the time has come to stop criminalizing people for drug use. The initiative was spearheaded by Drug Policy Action, DPA’s advocacy and political arm.

Measure 110 shifts the focus where it belongs—on people and public health—and removes one of the most common justifications for law enforcement to harass, arrest, prosecute, incarcerate, and deport people. As we saw with the domino effect of marijuana legalization, we expect this victory to inspire other states to enact their own drug decriminalization policies that prioritize health over punishment.
In addition to decriminalizing possession, Measure 110 will greatly expand access to evidence-informed drug treatment, peer support, housing, and harm reduction services, without raising taxes. Services will be funded through excess marijuana tax revenue and savings from no longer arresting, incarcerating, and prosecuting people for drug possession.

According to a report by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission released by the Oregon Secretary of State, passage of this measure will reduce drug possession convictions of Black and Indigenous Oregonians by 94%.

This Oregon victory demonstrates that decriminalization is politically viable, spurring potential efforts in other states, including California, Vermont, and Washington, and even in Congress.

Learn more.

**Every Single Marijuana Ballot Measure Passed on Election Day**

Marijuana reform swept across the board in Tuesday’s elections, a major boost in the fight to end prohibition.

New Jersey (where DPA has worked for nearly 20 years), Montana, South Dakota, and Arizona all passed measures to legalize marijuana for adult use. These victories will go a long way to undoing the harms of marijuana prohibition. In New Jersey, for example, the police make more than 32,000 arrests a year for marijuana, the vast majority just for simple possession and disproportionately targeting people of color, at a cost of $143 million.

A total of 15 states, and Washington, D.C., have now legalized marijuana for adult use.

On the medical marijuana front, voters in South Dakota passed a measure to create safe, regulated, and legal access for patients. Meanwhile, Mississippi became one of the few states in the Deep South to legalize medical marijuana. Drug Policy Action, DPA’s advocacy and political arm, had worked on Mississippi’s campaign for several years, partnering with our local allies at every step of the way—from drafting the amendment, to signature gathering, to getting it across the finish line.

Mississippi’s measure faced a unique challenge ahead of the election, as the
state's legislature placed an alternative, more restrictive medical marijuana measure on the ballot. Activists were concerned that the inclusion of the alternative would confuse voters and cause both to fail. Nonetheless, our Mississippi allies' measure passed with 73.9% of the vote.

These victories are crucial to reforming marijuana laws in other states and at the federal level. They demonstrate that reform is tenable outside the East and West Coasts, including in some of the regions hardest hit by the drug war, like the South and Midwest.

Read more.

Join DPA's Reformer Club

%%FIRST NAME%%, we might have won big this election cycle, but our work is far from over. Because the truth is, there were still 1.35 million arrests for drug possession in 2019. We can't become complacent, not even for a second. Drug war zealots are relentless and to fight them, we must be too. That's why we need you to join the Reformers Club with a monthly donation. We must continue to think big and fight hard, and with your support we can. Become a Reformers Club member today!

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: Oregon Makes History
Last night, Oregon made history as the 1st state to decriminalize drug possession, removing one of the top excuses for law enforcement encounters. This is just the beginning. DPA is energized to make all drug decrim a reality in all 50 states. Join us. ow.ly/RRbL50CbRRU

Follow DPA on Twitter.

Treatment Centers That Rely on Arrests to Get Clients Seek to Profit from Pain

“As the coronavirus bore down on our country in March, those of us working on criminal justice reform saw the potential for a real crisis that many were either ignoring or had not yet considered. Correctional facilities, unsanitary at the best of times, were set to be hotbeds of disease due to the challenges of social distancing in such close quarters, as well as the already-limited access to the most basic personal hygiene products.

Unlike the majority of prosecutors who failed to act early and decisively to protect the health of their communities, Baltimore State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby took swift action to reduce jail and prison capacity by treating drug use as a public health issue rather than a criminal justice one.”

Kassandra Frederique, DPA’s executive director, was disturbed to read recent comments in The Baltimore Sun by drug treatment providers complaining that their finances have been negatively impacted by Ms. Mosby’s lifesaving decision to stop prosecuting people who use drugs during the pandemic.
In [this op-ed](#), Kassandra explains why the complaints from these facilities are not only out of touch with trends in this country, but are also deeply concerning.

*Read more.*

**Successful Marijuana Votes Set the Stage for Legalization in New York and New Mexico**

Following the passage of marijuana legalization measures in New Jersey and Arizona, two of the states' respective neighbors are well-positioned to pass legalization bills of their own.

New Yorkers will soon have the option to make an easy trip across the river to New Jersey for legal marijuana access, continuing the outflow of dollars that could otherwise help rebuild their local communities that have been devastated by marijuana criminalization. Or, alternatively, [New York could take the lead on marijuana legalization](#) by establishing the most ambitious legalization program in the country, and implementing legalization with a social justice lens – where other states have fallen short.

DPA is urging Gov. Cuomo, [who has indicated his support](#) for legalizing marijuana in the year ahead, to work with the state legislature to cement New York as the national model for marijuana legalization by centering reinvestment, equity, and justice within comprehensive reform.

Meanwhile, Arizona will soon join Colorado as a destination for New Mexicans to access legal marijuana for recreational purposes. Just like New York, New Mexico will also see an outflow of dollars that could instead be reinvested into communities impacted by cannabis arrests.

New Mexicans are ready for marijuana legalization, and they want to see equity built into the legislative proposal to help right the many wrongs caused by the failed war on drugs. DPA is calling for legislation introduced in the upcoming 2021 legislative session to [reinvest back into communities most harmed by drug prohibition](#), particularly Latino, Black, and Native populations in New Mexico.

Repairing the damage done by marijuana prohibition is not negotiable. It is time to stop criminalizing people for marijuana and instead realize the
economic and social benefits of having marijuana possession and sales regulated in New York and New Mexico.

DPA's Podcast, Drugs & Stuff: The Promises and Perils of Opioid Litigation

In October, the news broke that the Department of Justice had reached an $8 billion-plus settlement with Purdue Pharma for its role in the opioid crisis. This money should be used to combat the public health emergency of overdose deaths, but another public health emergency -- the COVID-19 pandemic -- has taken hold of media coverage and government spending. As overdose deaths continue to increase, where will this money actually go?

We sat down with Christine Minhee, an expert on opioid litigation and creator of the Opioid Settlement Tracker, a project that asks, “Will opioid settlements actually be spent in ways that bolster the public health response to drug addiction?”

In the latest episode of DPA's podcast, Drugs & Stuff, Christine spoke with Mary Sylla, a senior staff attorney with DPA, about what opioid litigation is, why it's so complex, how it ties into our current moment, and what her pie in the sky dream for a settlement would look like.

Listen now on our website or on your favorite podcast streaming platforms. The podcast’s full back catalog can be found here.

Listen to the latest episode here.

California Voters Advance and Protect Criminal Justice Reform

On Tuesday, voters in California took significant steps toward building a more humane and equitable approach to the criminal legal system, and protecting hard-won progress.

Voters passed Proposition 17, which restores voting rights to Californians who have completed their prison term and are on parole. This is a profound
step forward in the state, where nearly 50,000 people who have returned home from prison can't vote.

The regressive Proposition 20 was defeated by California voters. If it had passed, it would have rolled back effective criminal justice reforms, expanded felony charges for low-level crimes, and wasted tens of millions of taxpayer dollars on prisons.

In Los Angeles County, voters passed Measure J. It requires that at least 10% of existing locally-controlled revenues – about $1 billion – is invested into communities and alternatives to incarceration, not police or prisons.

These wins move the state away from criminalization and senseless punishment. They make clear that Californians are serious about undoing the harms caused by the criminal legal system in our communities, and making space for a more compassionate approach.

**Drug Policy in the News**

*GQ:* Last Night's Biggest Loser? The War on Drugs

*Wired:* Voters Rejecting the War on Drugs Is a Win for Public Health

*Marijuana Moment:* New York Governor Says Time Is 'Ripe' For Marijuana Legalization, And It'll Pass 'This Year'

*Washington Post:* D.C. Voters Approve Ballot Question To Decriminalize Psychedelic Mushrooms

*Filter:* Inside the CDC Data That Confirm the Pandemic Is Driving Up Overdose Deaths

*Business Insider:* Oregon Has Become the First State to Legalize 'Magic' Mushrooms for Therapeutic Use. Here's What That Means.
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