October Newsletter

The Drug War Robbed Breonna Taylor of Her Future

Last week, Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron announced charges against one of the three officers who killed Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical worker who was shot by Louisville Police during a baseless no-knock warrant in a drug investigation. DPA was deeply disappointed that only one of the three officers were indicted, and on a charge of “wanton endangerment” that fails to account for the horrific violence that the police perpetrated against her.

“Breonna Taylor should be alive today, but instead, the systems we have in place – as a result of the drug war – failed her. And they robbed her of the bright future she was just beginning. Had it not been for the drug war, which provides the military-grade equipment to local police departments through military weapons transfer and earmarked federal funds, Breonna would be alive today. And had it not been for the drug war that incentivizes drug arrests with said federal resources, the police likely would have never gone to her home to begin with,” said Kassandra Frederique, DPA’s executive director.

“As long as the drug war remains, people of color will continue to have a bounty on their heads. They will continue to be gunned down in their beds, or held down until they can’t breathe with an officer’s knee on their necks. And worse, those responsible for their deaths will use drugs – or alleged drug involvement – as a cover for their merciless actions.”

“This isn’t an isolated incident. These aren’t ‘a few bad cops,’” Kassandra continued. “It is a system that has been created through the parasitic relationship between policing, the drug war and racism. And until we completely terminate those connections, we are simply adding fuel to the fire and no court or jury will be able to stop the police violence that ensues.”

Learn more about how the drug war fuels police violence
Pledge to Vote this Election Year

It’s clearer than ever that the drug war is a public health crisis, a tool of racial oppression and a wasteful misuse of government resources. And it’s also clear that more and more Americans like you are demanding reform.

As national momentum grows for decarceration and shifting resources away from police, several states are also considering ballot measures to legalize marijuana, and Oregon could become the first state in the country to vote to eliminate criminal penalties for the personal use and possession of all drugs and expand access to addiction services.

This is a critical moment for the fate of drug policy. We must stay focused on what we’re fighting for – including responding to COVID-19, ending drug war-fueled racist policing practices, and reforming drug policy across the country.

A lot is at stake and we hope you make your voice heard and your vote count this election year! Visit HeadCount.org to register to vote, check your registration status, request mail ballots and find other important voting information.

Then, add your name here and take our pledge to vote in this year’s election.

DPA Mourns the Passing of Elizabeth Owens, NY Harm Reduction Activist

DPA mourns the passing of New York harm reduction activist Elizabeth Owens.

Owens worked as an outreach worker and then as a community organizer for VOCAL-NY, a powerful grassroots organization providing harm reduction services and advocating to end the war on drugs. Her passion for the work stemmed from her desire to improve the health and wellness of others who were living with hepatitis C, as she was.

Writing on Twitter, VOCAL-NY paid tribute to Elizabeth’s legacy:

“If you’ve met Elizabeth, you’ll remember her. She greeted you with a loud ‘thank you for coming to work today!’ and gave you a big hug, never a handshake. She talked to everyone on the street or the subway, breaking the monotony of a commute to work [with] her infectious smile and laugh.”

“Elizabeth always showed up as her full self – a drug user, formerly homeless, ‘gay
as hell’ and a powerful advocate for her community. She was never afraid to be on the front lines of a protest, and spent [hours] knocking doors across the city to recruit and inspire [people] to join our fight.”

“She will be deeply missed and we will celebrate her life soon. We love you Elizabeth!”

Learn more about Elizabeth Owens’ legacy.

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

FEATURED POST: Fight Racism. End the Drug War.

Policing and enforcement of the drug war has always been racially targeted, with a particularly cruel impact on generations of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people.

The drug war tears apart lives, families, and communities. As we fight to end systemic racism it’s clear that ending the drug war is a critical piece of the puzzle.

We need your help now, dignify the lives of people who use drugs, and everyone touched by the drug war. https://bit.ly/2FTy1w
Join DPA on Facebook.

Syringe Access Bill in California Signed into Law by Governor Newsom

On September 29, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the Pharmacy Access Bill (AB 2077), which was co-sponsored by DPA, into law. The measure protects pharmacist’s discretion to provide sterile syringes without a prescription, and allows adult possession of syringes for personal use. This legislation is a vital component of the state’s comprehensive approach to preventing the spread of HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

“By signing this bill into law, Governor Newsom has rightly shown he understands the necessity of providing people who use drugs with sterile syringes as a means of preventing infectious diseases,” said Jeannette Zanipati, DPA’s California state director. “At a time when we are already trying to stem the blow of COVID-19 and an overdose crisis which has been exacerbated by the pandemic, ensuring we protect the health of our most at-risk communities with this cost-effective measure, and not further overwhelm the public health system, is paramount.”

The measure also requires pharmacists to inform consumers on the safe disposal of syringes, provide them with access to disposal containers, and educate them on HIV and hepatitis prevention, treatment, and testing. Because the syringes will be sold to consumers through participating pharmacies, it comes at no cost to the state, while saving the state from significant healthcare costs of having to treat these potentially deadly diseases.

Learn more.

House Delays Crucial Marijuana Vote

The U.S. House vote on the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act that was anticipated for September has been delayed until after the November elections. The effort to move it forward was derailed at the last minute due to unsubstantiated concerns by some
Congressmen.

Continued enforcement of marijuana prohibition laws is responsible for more than 600,000 arrests in the United States every year, disproportionately impacting Black and Brown people.

The MORE Act is a necessary step toward justice that would end the federal war on marijuana and begin to undo the damage of prohibition. It will decriminalize marijuana at the federal level, expunge marijuana convictions, and reinvest in communities hit hardest by drug prohibition.

"Unfortunately, this decision means justice delayed for millions of Black, Latinx, Indigenous and low-income individuals disproportionately impacted by our country's racist marijuana laws. We cannot continue to force these communities to wait for a 'politically convenient' moment while they continue to be robbed of employment opportunities, housing, education, other government programs, and even their children or immigration status," warned Maritza Perez, director of the Office of National Affairs at DPA.

“If members of Congress are serious in their commitment to responding to calls for racial justice, then this vote must take place the moment the House is back in session following the elections. Even with just a six week delay, approximately 77,000 more people could be arrested on marijuana charges, based on current averages - most of which could have been avoided.”

Learn more

Drug Policy in the News

Associated Press: NJ Voters Weigh Putting Pot Legalization in Constitution

Marijuana Moment: California Governor Approves Changes to Marijuana Banking and Labeling Laws

Forbes: Breonna Taylor is a Drug War Victim

The Guardian: New Zealand Cools on Legalizing Cannabis

Wall Street Journal: The Opioid Crisis, Already Serious, Has Intensified During Coronavirus Pandemic

Filter: "The Drum Beat in My Head Gets Louder" - Meet DPA's New Leader
Put DPA in your will or estate plan. Find out more about how to join The Ashawna Hailey Planned Giving Society today.

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