

October 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

cc: Honorable Members of the full U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations - founded and led by people directly impacted by the criminal legal system - write to express our support for the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement Act (MORE Act) (H.R. 3884). **We strongly urge you to vote in favor of this legislation when it comes to the House floor for a vote.**

The MORE Act, introduced by Representative Jerry Nadler (D-NY) and Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) represents one of the most comprehensive marijuana reform bills ever introduced in Congress. This bill legalizes marijuana by removing it from the Controlled Substance Act but also acknowledges the decades of injustice and harm caused by ineffective drug laws and includes measures to rectify the devastation that low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately face. As people directly impacted by the criminal legal system, including in many cases by the very laws this bill seeks to rectify, we believe the MORE Act is the only legislation before Congress that fully addresses the damage inflicted on our families and communities.

We urge Members of Congress to support this legislation in light of significant support for this measure and the need to address the continued harms of marijuana criminalization. An ever-growing majority of Americans in the United States support legalizing marijuana. According to an October 2019 Gallup poll, two in three Americans now support legalization.ⁱ Many states have begun to enact legislation decriminalizing the medical or adult use of marijuana; 33 states and the District of Columbia legalized medical marijuana and 11 states and the District of Columbia have legalized adult use of marijuana. Despite these trends, marijuana arrests continue. In 2018, a marijuana arrest occurred every 48 seconds, impacting 663,367 people, according to data released by the FBI.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, racial inequalities persist with 46.9% of people

arrested for drug violations being Black or Latinx while representing only 31.5% of the U.S. population.ⁱⁱⁱ

The MORE Act directly addresses these racial disparities. The bill provides a pathway to expunge past marijuana related convictions, re-sentence individuals with current marijuana convictions, and address the collateral consequences that accompany a drug conviction. The legislation also protects residents of this country from exclusions that preclude them from federal benefits due to a prior conviction for a marijuana offense. We cannot fully underscore how important and critical these factors are for better enabling formerly incarcerated and convicted people, such as ourselves, to succeed after decades of barriers to economic and social opportunities that would allow us to flourish in our communities.

The MORE Act also addresses economic justice - an equally important component that should be included in efforts to end marijuana prohibition. The marijuana industry is growing rapidly and generating significant profit for investors and jobs for people.^{iv} Many of us who have been harmed by these marijuana drug laws lack the financial resources to benefit from this growing industry even if our records are cleared. The MORE Act ensures people most harmed by decades of draconian drug laws can benefit from the growing industry. The bill directs 5% of federal marijuana tax revenue to a Cannabis Opportunity Trust Fund that will establish a community reinvestment grant program that can provide funding to grassroots organizations led by individuals most harmed by the war on drugs. The Trust Fund will also provide loans to directly impacted entrepreneurs as a pathway into a marijuana industry that has systematically excluded directly impacted people either due to legal bans or lack of capital.

Some lawmakers would assert that incremental reform starting with addressing the marijuana industry are steps in the right direction. We disagree. Comprehensive reform is necessary and must happen now. Without comprehensive reform such as the MORE Act, those of us most harmed by marijuana drug laws will continue to suffer from lifetime collateral consequences and continue to be shut out of the opportunity to participate and benefit from the legal market.

The MORE Act provides a clear path forward that rights the wrongs of prohibition, centering families and individuals directly impacted by our failed marijuana laws and criminal legal system. We ask that Members of Congress support this critical piece of legislation and vote in favor of it on the House floor. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact DeAnna Hoskins (JustLeadershipUSA) at deanna@jlusa.org or Queen Adesuyi (Drug Policy Alliance) at qadesuyi@drugpolicy.org.

Sincerely,

A New Path (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)
Alabama Justice Initiative

Broken No More
Cabrini Green Leadership
CHOOSE1.org
College and Community Fellowship
Crack Open the Door
EX-incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO)
Formerly Incarcerated Union
Justice Strategies
JustLeadershipUSA
MacArthur Foundation Safety & Justice Challenge
Community Collaborative Member Pima County
Metro Detroit Out4Life Reentry Coalition
Michigan Liberation
Michigan United
MissionGreen
National Council for Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
NC Community Bail Fund of Durham
NC Survivors Union
Peace By Piece Inc.
Protect Families First
Reentry Advocacy Project
Reentry Campus Program
Reframe Health and Justice
ReInventing ReEntry
SARC Center For Health,Equity & Justice
Southern Recovery Advocacy
Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
The Center for Returning Citizens
The Ordinary People Society (TOPS)
Truth Pharm
Urban Scholars Union
Urban Survivors Union
Women Involved in Reentry Efforts - W.I.R.E

ⁱ Jones, Jeremy M. “US Support for Legal Marijuana Steady in Past Year.” *Gallup*. October 23, 2019.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/267698/support-legal-marijuana-steady-past-year.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Angell, Tom. “Marijuana Arrests Increased Again Last Year Despite More States Legalizing, FBI Data Shows.” October 1, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomangell/2019/10/01/marijuana-arrests-increased-again-last-year-despite-more-states-legalizing-fbi-data-shows/#2517535c7e21>

ⁱⁱⁱ Drug Policy Alliance. “Drug War Statistics.” <http://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/drug-war-statistics>

^{iv} Williams, Sean. “How Big Could the Marijuana Industry Grow?” *The Motley Fool*.

<https://www.fool.com/investing/2019/03/03/how-big-could-the-marijuana-industry-grow.aspx>