

November 30, 2020

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
235 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
H-204, The Capitol H-107
Washington, DC 20515

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Vote YES on the MORE Act (H.R. 3884)

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Honorable Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

The undersigned – musicians, actors, artists, athletes, influencers, and advocates – strongly support ending the harmful era of marijuana prohibition in the U.S. We also acknowledge, however, that any marijuana reform must be intentional about reinvesting in communities harmed by the War on Drugs. As individuals with public profiles, we believe it is incumbent on all of us, especially lawmakers, to advance social justice. **Thus, we urge you to vote in favor of the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment & Expungement (MORE) Act (H.R. 3884) when it comes to the House floor in December this year.**

The MORE Act reflects the will of the American people—68% of U.S. adults now support legalization¹ and this election cycle we saw a resounding vote in favor of legalization across the country.² Yet, marijuana remains a federally prohibited Schedule 1 drug. The continued enforcement of marijuana prohibition laws results in over half a million arrests annually,³ disproportionately devastating people and communities of color. An arrest or incarceration for a marijuana law violation cripples individual lives and families, seriously hindering a person’s ability to work, find housing, and otherwise provide for their families. Despite similar rates of use across race, the ACLU reports that on a national level, Black people are almost four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana.⁴ And while Black and Latinx people have carried the brunt of decades of marijuana criminalization, they have been shut out of the regulated marijuana marketplace due to previous convictions and financial barriers to entry. It is estimated that less than 20 percent of the marijuana industry is owned or operated by people of color.⁵

As the U.S. grapples with the aftermath of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless other Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people harmed by state-sanctioned

¹ Gallup, Nov. 9, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/323582/support-legal-marijuana-inches-new-high.aspx>.

² CNN, Nov. 6, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/06/business/cannabis-election-win/index.html>.

³ FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2019, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/persons-arrested>.

⁴ ACLU, April 20, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>.

⁵ Center for American Progress, May 20, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/reports/2019/05/20/470031/using-marijuana-revenue-create-jobs/>.

violence, it is critical that our public policy center racial equity and reparative justice. Furthermore, passage of the bill will also help ameliorate economic hardship caused by COVID-19 as the bill will minimize barriers to employment resulting from prior criminal history. Also, ending the federal criminalization of marijuana will allow state marijuana regulatory programs to flourish, generating crucial new jobs and revenue for states and localities. The MORE Act is an important piece of marijuana justice legislation that meets the needs of this moment.

The MORE Act would improve the lives of Americans in the following ways:

Removing marijuana from the schedule of controlled substances. Under the Controlled Substances Act of 1972, marijuana is classified as a Schedule I substance – a classification reserved for drugs with a high potential for abuse and lack of accepted medical uses. This classification as related to marijuana is flawed, outdated, and intellectually dishonest. At the same time, the strict Schedule I classification, is a significant barrier to research and makes medical marijuana inaccessible to veterans through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. It also leaves noncitizens vulnerable to deportation and denial of citizenship – even in legal marijuana states – simply for marijuana use or due to working in a state-legal marijuana market. Marijuana’s federal prohibition also continues to be a significant barrier to financial services for marijuana businesses. Importantly, descheduling would not change the status of marijuana in any given state; states that currently prohibit marijuana would still need to go through their own process to legalize and regulate marijuana. Descheduling and the MORE Act, however, would protect state programs from federal intervention.

Resentencing and retroactively expunging marijuana-related offenses. The MORE Act would begin the resentencing and expungement process for individuals with federal marijuana offenses, reducing the size of the federal prison population. It would provide funding for states and localities to also expunge and resentence marijuana convictions. Depopulating jails and prisons has never been more appropriate than it is today, both as a COVID-19 prevention measure and as a response to the calls for justice and police reform. In fact, moving away from marijuana enforcement may increase trust in police and begin to repair the broken relationships between police and the communities they serve.

Reinvesting in directly impacted communities through key grant programs. The MORE Act would place a modest tax on marijuana sales at the manufacturer level to establish a Cannabis Opportunity Trust Fund. The Trust Fund would administer three key grants, all aimed at reinvesting in communities historically harmed by U.S. marijuana prohibition: (1) The Community Reinvestment Grant Program to fund community organizations providing social and/or health services in communities deeply harmed by the war on drugs; (2) The Cannabis Opportunity Program to fund Small Business Administration loans to support socially and economically disadvantaged individuals in the legal marijuana marketplace; and (3) The Equitable Licensing Grant Program to provide state and local jurisdictions with funds to develop and implement marijuana licensing programs grounded in equity that are inclusive of individuals adversely affected by the war on drugs.

Prohibiting the denial of federal benefits (e.g. SNAP, public housing) and immigration penalties for marijuana-related offenses. Any exposure to the criminal legal system can have significant consequences on physical and mental wellbeing, but marijuana prohibition has also had other broad collateral consequences. Drug offenses have been a pretext to exclude individuals and families from federal benefits programs including nutrition assistance like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), higher education financial assistance, and public housing. It is cruel to ban access to life stabilizing support because of drug use or a previous conviction – particularly as more states legalize marijuana and families increasingly need more support in the time of COVID-19. Additionally, drug law violations, marijuana convictions especially, continue to be a driver of deportations of noncitizens. In 2013, simple marijuana possession was one of the top causes of deportation and the most common cause of deportation for drug law violations.⁶ The MORE Act would prohibit these significant consequences.

Reparative justice must be central to any federal marijuana reform effort. The MORE Act takes significant steps to right the wrongs of decades of federal marijuana criminalization by reinvesting in communities who have dealt with and continue to bear the brunt of over-enforcement and racially biased policing. It also takes significant steps toward ensuring that the emerging industry is diverse, inclusive, and rooted in equity. **The MORE Act is needed now more than ever before and we urge you to vote in favor of this bill.**

Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Queen Adesuyi (qadesuyi@drugpolicy.org) or Maritza Perez (mperez@drugpolicy.org) of the Drug Policy Alliance.

Sincerely,

Al Harrington, former NBA athlete and marijuana entrepreneur

Anna Symonds, former USA rugby athlete

Ashlee Marie Preston, media personality/activist

Baby Bash, recording artist

Carmen Perez, civil & human rights activist

Dr. Charles H.F. Davis III, Assistant Professor at The University of Michigan in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education

Eben Britton, former NFL athlete

Frank Shamrock, former professional mixed martial artist/UFC athlete

⁶ Drug Policy Alliance, April 9, 2014, <https://www.drugpolicy.org/blog/drug-war-mass-deportation-250000-deported-drug-offenses-last-6-years>.

Gina Belafonte, activist

Gwen Jorgensen, Olympian

Idalia Valles, actor

Josh Weinstein, writer on The Simpsons

Kevin Garnett, former NBA athlete

Leonard A. Marshall, Jr., former NFL athlete

Louis Lombardi, actor on The Sopranos

Marvin A. Washington, former NFL athlete

Matt Barnes, former NBA athlete

Maya Jupiter, hip hop artist

Michael Skolnik, co-founder, Soze

Mike de la Rocha, co-founder, Revolve Impact

Molly Swenson, entrepreneur

Mystic, hip hop artist

Nick Huff Barili, journalist

Nkeka Ogwumike, WNBA player

Rain Phoenix, artist

Rosalie Fish, Indigenous track athlete

Steve Bloom, photographer and writer

Thais Stiklorius, founder, Friends At Work

Ty Dolla \$ign, recording artist

Cc:

Rep. Jerry Nadler, Chair, House Judiciary Committee

Rep. Frank Pallone, Chair, House Energy & Commerce Committee

Rep. Collin Peterson, Chair, House Agricultural Committee

Rep. Bobby Scott, Chair, House Education & Labor Committee

Rep. Richard Neal, Chair, House Ways & Means Committee

Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, Chair, House Natural Resources Committee

Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Chair, House Oversight & Reform Committee

Rep. Nydia Velazquez, Chair, House Small Business Committee