
It's Time to Regulate and Tax Marijuana:

HB 1550, SB 5598

The ACLU of Washington supports legislation that would regulate and tax marijuana for adults twenty-one and older. Marijuana production and sales would be regulated by the Washington State Liquor Control Board.

Our Current Laws Waste Public Safety Resources and Are Ineffective

In 2009, Washington courts handled over 12,000 marijuana cases. Data included in the Washington State Office of Financial Management's analysis of last year's version of this bill suggest that marijuana regulation and taxation would save over \$25 million annually in jail, court, and corrections costs. Plus, it would generate over \$300 million in new revenue per biennium.

Adults convicted of marijuana crimes face incarceration, fines, and the stigma of a lifetime criminal record. Even if a prosecution doesn't result in a conviction, the court file is available to employers, landlords, colleges, and the general public.

In a time of strapped government budgets, we need to rethink our approach to marijuana policy. Law enforcement should be focusing its efforts on violent crimes, not adult marijuana use.

We do not arrest and jail people simply for using alcohol or tobacco. Rather, we recognize these are public health issues, and address addiction with treatment and public education. We should treat marijuana use as a public health concern too, rather than as a criminal matter.

Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Will Bring Safer Communities and Fairer Results

- **Direct scarce public safety resources to tackling violent crimes:**
Our blanket prohibition on marijuana means our increasingly scarce law enforcement resources are wasted pursuing nonviolent adult marijuana users, rather than combating violent crimes. Washington state and local governments spend at least twenty-five million dollars each year treating adult marijuana use as a crime while half of all violent crimes go unsolved.
- **End unfairly harsh consequences for individuals:**
Even apart from jail and fines, marijuana convictions have significant long-term consequences for people's lives, including loss of employment, housing, and federal financial aid for college. And, Washington's communities of color are disproportionately arrested and prosecuted for marijuana offenses, despite using and selling it at similar rates. For example, African Americans are three times as likely to be arrested, charged, and convicted for a marijuana offense as are white people in this state.
- **Generate revenue for state and local budgets:**
Marijuana is already Washington's second-biggest cash crop—but our state doesn't see a dime of tax revenue from it. The blanket ban on marijuana means our state has given up the power to control and regulate it as we do alcohol and tobacco. Bringing marijuana under state regulation would not only undercut revenue for illegal cartels, but also generate hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenues each year.



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