August 13, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 220 national advocacy organizations, and more than 125 national, state, and local drug policy, criminal justice reform, and civil rights organizations, we write to communicate our strong support of the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act (H.R.3884) and urge you to bring this bill to the House floor for a vote in September.

The MORE Act is bipartisan legislation supported by the Marijuana Justice Coalition, of which The Leadership Conference is a part. Since first convening in 2018, the Marijuana Justice Coalition has worked tirelessly to advance the MORE Act – the most sweeping piece of marijuana reform ever considered by the U.S. Congress. Last year, shortly after the bill’s introduction, more than 100 national and state organizations collectively urged the House of Representatives to swiftly advance this comprehensive marijuana justice policy that addresses criminal justice reform, racial justice, and equity.

In November 2019, the House Judiciary Committee made history when it advanced the MORE Act, becoming the first congressional body to vote favorably for a marijuana descheduling bill. Since that time, the circumstances of 2020 have made the failed scheduling bill more untenable and amplified the voices of those demanding its transformation in our criminal legal system. In the face of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and a growing national dialogue on unjust law enforcement practices, marijuana reform as a modest first step at chipping away at the War on Drugs is more relevant and more pressing than ever before. The MORE Act remains the most effective and equitable way forward.

Mass criminalization, racially biased policing, and over-enforcement of drug law violations have devastated the social and economic fabrics of communities of color, while also tearing apart the lives of millions of individuals and families. The continued enforcement of marijuana prohibition laws results in over 600,000 arrests annually, disproportionately impacting people of color. This results in family separation when a jail or prison sentence is involved. This also means that these individuals will be marked with a drug conviction record that will affect their ability to work, find housing, and otherwise provide for their families. Further, marijuana criminalization continues to be a driver of family separation in the immigration system. In 2013, simple marijuana possession was one of the top causes of deportation and the most common cause of deportation for drug law violations. And while Black and Latino people have carried the brunt of marijuana criminalization, they have been
shut out of the regulated marijuana marketplace due to these very same criminal records in addition to financial barriers to entry. Currently, it is estimated that less than one percent of the marijuana industry is owned or operated by people of color.

The MORE Act addresses the collateral consequences of federal marijuana criminalization and takes steps to ensure the legal marketplace is diverse and inclusive of individuals most adversely impacted by prohibition. It begins by removing marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act (descheduling). This provision alone will have a significant impact, as it will decriminalize marijuana at the federal level while enabling states to set their own regulatory policies without threat of federal interference. Descheduling also protects noncitizens from immigration consequences due to marijuana activity, including noncitizens working in state-legal marijuana marketplaces. The bill also prevents the government from denying an individual federal benefits, student financial aid, or security clearances needed to obtain government jobs because of marijuana use. Most importantly, the MORE Act takes significant steps to right the wrongs of decades of federal marijuana criminalization by providing for the expungement and resentencing of marijuana offenses. With a modest five percent federal excise tax on marijuana sales at the manufacturer level, the MORE Act would fund social services in communities most harmed by the War on Drugs as well as Small Business Administration programming to achieve a diverse and inclusive legal marketplace.

The MORE Act is needed now more than ever before. It can help alleviate public health challenges caused by COVID-19 in jails and prisons by reducing the number of people who are incarcerated. 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 and will help generate hundreds of thousands of new jobs. Additionally, ending the federal criminalization of marijuana will allow state marijuana regulatory programs to flourish, generating crucial new revenue for states and localities.

Now is the time for the MORE Act to reach the House floor for a vote. We strongly urge House leadership to support the passage of this bill this Congress and schedule the bill for a vote in September. If you have any questions, please contact Sakira Cook (The Leadership Conference) at cook@civilrights.org or Maritza Perez (Drug Policy Alliance) at mperez@drugpolicy.org.

Sincerely,

Vanita Gupta
President & CEO

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, Natural Resources Committee
Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Chair, House Oversight & Reform Committee
Rep. Nydia Velazquez, Chair, House Small Business Committee

Organizations
70 Million Votes-Ex-Offender Action Network
Alabama NORML
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
American Civil Liberties Union
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Andrew Goodman Foundation
A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)
The Arcview Group
Arizona NORML
Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Beyond Equity
Black to the Future Action Fund
Brown University SSDP
California NORML
California National Organization for Women
Cannabis Doing Good
Cannabis Impact Fund
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Popular Democracy
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU Law
Charm City Care Connection
Chicago NORML
Chicago Urban League
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE)
Clergy for a New Drug Policy
Community Gardens Inc
Colorado NORML
Cruel Consequences Portraits of Misguided Law
CSU Channel Islands Students for Sensible Drug Policy
DACO
DC NORML
The Decarceration Collective
Defending Rights & Dissent
Delaware NORML
DFW NORML
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
Doctors for Cannabis Regulation
Drug Policy Alliance
Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii
Empire State NORML
Family Law & Cannabis Alliance (FLCA)
Garden State NORML
Georgia Moms United to End the War on Drugs
Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America
Green Believers Meet Up Los Angeles
Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University
HIPS
Hip Hop For Change, Inc
The Hood Incubator
Human Rights Watch
Illinois Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Just Cities
Justice Roundtable
Justice Strategies
Juvenile Law Center
Kansas NORML
Kentucky NORML
kindColorado
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Lehigh Valley NORML
Life for Pot
Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches
Los Angeles NORML
Marijuana Matters
Matthew Shepard Foundation
Michigan State University Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Minority Cannabis Business Association
Minneapolis Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Minorities for Medical Marijuana
Mommieactivist and Sons
MomsRising
Motor City NORML
NAACP
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Social Workers
National Cannabis Festival
National Employment Law Project
National Organization for Women
National Juvenile Justice Network
Nevada NORML
NORML
NORML of Florida
NORML of Michigan
NORML Tallahassee
North Carolina NORML
Northern Wisconsin NORML
Oaksterdam University
The Original Equity Group SPC
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Peachtree NORML
Project Mission Green
Public Justice Center
Randy Joe’s Veterans Program
Reno NORML
Revolve Impact
SEIU
The Sentencing Project
Southern Arizona NORML
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
St. Ann’s Corner of Harm Reduction
StoptheDrugWar.org
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Students for Sensible Drug Policy - Oakland Community College
Students for Sensible Drug Policy - UCI Law
Students for Sensible Drug Policy at DePaul University
Students for Sensible Drug Policy at IUPUI
Students for Sensible Drug Policy University of Maryland Chapter
Suncoast NORML
The Taifa Group
Tennessee NORML
UC Hastings Law Students for Sensible Drug Policy
United CORE Alliance
University of Missouri
Veterans Cannabis Coalition
Virginia NORML
VOCAL-NY
Voices for Progress
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
West Virginia University Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Willamette College of Law SSDP
William C. Velasquez Institute
Wisconsin NORML
Worth Rises
Wyoming NORML

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iv The Drug War = Mass Deportation: 250,000 Deported for Drug Offenses in Last 6 Years, Drug Policy Alliance, Apr. 9, 2014, https://www.drugpolicy.org/blog/drug-war-mass-deportation-250000-deported-drug-offenses-last-6-years