



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.<sup>i</sup> Since that time, the circumstances of 2020 have made the failed War on Drugs even more untenable and amplified the voices of those demanding 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.<sup>ii</sup> 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.<sup>iii</sup> In 2013, simple marijuana possession was one of the top causes of deportation and the most common cause of deportation for drug law violations.<sup>iv</sup> And while Black and Latino people have carried the brunt of marijuana criminalization, they have been

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Vanita Gupta

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<sup>v</sup>.

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](mailto:cook@civilrights.org) or Maritza Perez (Drug Policy Alliance) at [mperez@drugpolicy.org](mailto: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**

70MillionVotes-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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<sup>i</sup> Claire Hansen, Comprehensive Marijuana Legalization Bill Passes House Committee in Historic Vote, USA News, Nov. 19, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2019-11-20/comprehensive-marijuana-legalization-bill-passes-house-committee-in-historic-vote>.

<sup>ii</sup> 2017 Crime in the United States, FBI, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017>

<sup>iii</sup> A Price too High, Human Rights Watch, Jun. 16, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/16/price-too-high/us-families-torn-apart-deportations-drug-offenses>.

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<sup>iv</sup> 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>

<sup>v</sup> Using Marijuana Revenue to Create Jobs, Center for American Progress, May 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/reports/2019/05/20/470031/using-marijuana-revenue-create-jobs/>