



Organizational Background

The war on drugs does far more harm than good. It is the engine that drives the record-breaking incarceration rates of the United States. It provides a contemporary veneer for longstanding racial prejudices and discriminations. It is the basis for depriving nearly one-and-a-half million Americans of the right to vote. It is the excuse for creating exceptions to the Constitution that has eviscerated civil liberties. And it is the rationale and excuse for allowing millions to suffer, and hundreds of thousands to die, rather than permit medications and public health interventions common elsewhere in the world.

Organizational Goals

DPA seeks to end the war on drugs. While our work addresses the wide range of social, political, and economic issues touched by the drug war, nearly all of our efforts fall under four substantive issue areas.

- 1. Reforming the criminal justice system.** The war on drugs drives the unprecedented rate of incarceration in the U.S. DPA seeks to end the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of people simply for drug use or possession.
- 2. Empowering public health approaches.** Treating drug use as a criminal rather than health matter leads to unnecessary death, disease, and suffering. DPA advocates sensible harm reduction policies to help minimize the negative health consequences of drug misuse and addiction.
- 3. Ending marijuana prohibition.** Marijuana prohibition is at the heart of the drug war and often serves as an introduction to the criminal justice system, especially for young people of color. More than 750,000 people were arrested for marijuana last year, 95 percent for simple possession. DPA advocates removing marijuana from the criminal justice system.
- 4. Promoting a more effective approach to youth and drugs.** Simplistic “just say no” messages and zero-tolerance programs don’t achieve their goals and contribute to the schools-to-jails pipeline. Abstinence is the only way to avoid the dangers of drug use, but DPA recognizes that complementary approaches – including access on demand to effective treatment programs – are needed for the majority of teens who do use alcohol, cigarettes, and various prescription and illicit drugs.

Mission

We envision a just society in which the use and regulation of drugs are grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights; in which people are no longer punished for what they put into their own bodies but only for crimes against others; and in which the fears, prejudices, and punitive prohibitions of today are no more. Our mission is to advance those policies and attitudes that best reduce the harms of both drug use and drug prohibition, and to promote the sovereignty of individuals over their minds and bodies.

DPA's Position on the Cost Benefit Analysis of Marijuana Legalization

Benefits of Legalization:

- We believe legalization has increased access to a safer alternative for medicinal use. We believe Opiate Recovery and PTSD are not qualifying conditions for a medical marijuana card and we believe that they should be added.
- We believe there has been a reduction in criminal justice expenditures as a result of decreased minor marijuana possession charges.
- We believe marijuana is potentially being used as a substitute for more addictive and potentially harmful drugs. This may be the case concerning youth in our state as well. The Health Kids Survey, produced by CDPHE does highlight a trend of reduction of other drug use since 2010.
- We believe legalization has increased mental health outcomes for suicidal patients.
- Marijuana revenues are a growing part of State and local use of tax revenues and continue to increase amidst growing state budget fiscal constraints.

What gaps exist in measuring the costs or benefits you've identified:

- Research on actual risk – We need better data to be able to assess the actual safety risks of marijuana compared to other substances (alcohol, prescription drugs, as well as other drugs) to be able to use data to determine the appropriate level of state resources used to combat potential harm of marijuana use
- Lack of data driven research on a state level regarding opioid and drug addiction costs and marijuana treatment efficacy.
- In 2013 we passed legislation creating a Minor in Possession of Marijuana charge with the intent to ensure those under 21 escape criminal charges through diversion opportunities and eventual expungement. We have no data to show if this is actually happening. We have seen an increase in minority youth being arrested/cited after legalization and we need local data to show whether kids under the age of 21 are being offered diversion and expungement for marijuana possession in lieu of petty offense charges and as a result of the 2013 CCJJ legislation.
- Arrest disparities – We need better training for law enforcement on appropriate responses to public consumption and minor marijuana offenses.

3. Given the costs, benefits, and measurement limitations, what legislative action can be taken?

- Approve marijuana consumption facilities to give people a place for consumers, tourists, etc to legally and safely consume marijuana.
- We believe Opiate Recovery and PTSD should be added to the allowed conditions to receive a medical marijuana card. We believe the Committee could recommend legislation to direct CDPHE to recommend the Board adopt both Opiate Recovery and PTSD to the list of approved conditions.
- We believe school based expulsions and suspensions based solely on marijuana possession and use should no longer be an option within our public school system.

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