



September 25, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Kevin Caldwell, and I serve as the Senior Manager of Legislative Affairs for the Marijuana Policy Project. Our organization has been working on reforming cannabis policy since 1995. There are many aspects to cannabis policy that have impacts in communities, states, and the nation. You will hear today from professionals who will highlight tax revenue benefits, personal freedom for adults, and community impacts.

While MPP can help legislators create a fair and equitable adult-use cannabis market, make suggestions for regulations or any other aspects of legalization, today, I am here to emphasize the criminal justice reform aspects of ending the failed policy of prohibition. We have not seen the sky fall in the 24 states that have legalized cannabis for adults. We have not seen a successful push to recriminalize cannabis come to fruition. We have seen the first half of the country fine-tune any perceived shortcomings, but there have been no rollbacks, and that includes decriminalization and medical cannabis states.

In all of the conversations around legalizing cannabis for adults, too often the conversation centers around tax revenue, which is an important aspect. All actions have perceived and real societal costs associated with them, and cannabis is no different. Depending on what side of the argument you find yourself on often decides what data is used, *or more importantly*, how that data is analyzed.

For the first 160 years of our nation, the cannabis plant played an important role in our nation, whether making rope as hemp, for social/spiritual needs, or as medicine. This plant was not criminalized until the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 was passed. Since Samuel Caldwell was the first person arrested in Colorado hours after the law went into effect, millions of Americans have had their lives negatively impacted by this prohibition.

According to cannabis arrest figures compiled from FBI reporting, 15,544,522 cannabis possession arrests were reported in the United States between 1990 and September 2026. That is millions of Americans who may have been denied education assistance, professional licensing, housing, parental custodial rights, in addition to their personal liberty. Not for distribution or growing cannabis, but for possession of a plant.

It is worth looking at the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania data since Colorado and Oregon voted to legalize cannabis in 2012. From January 2013 to December 2025, almost 254,000 Pennsylvanians have been arrested for possession of cannabis. In 2024, 11,189 people's lives were seriously disrupted by a possession charge. And in 2025, there were 10,858 arrests for

possession. When analyzing those figures, it should be pointed out that in almost all major urban areas of the state, decriminalization ordinances have been passed — so that arrest data is from outside of major urban areas.

In 2022, the Marijuana Policy Project released a report¹ detailing the states that continue to criminalize cannabis possession. During our analysis of Pennsylvania, we found that 62% of violent crimes resulted in an arrest, and only 31% of property crimes resulted in an arrest. At the time of our report, there were 153 rape kits untested due to the backlog at crime labs. If law enforcement focused their resources on more serious crimes, rather than arresting cannabis consumers, what would that data look like?

If we conservatively estimate that each cannabis arrest requires five hours of police time — securing the accused, cataloging the evidence, bringing the accused to jail, cataloging the cannabis to the evidence room, writing the police report and possibly court time—11,000 arrests utilize roughly 55,000 police hours a year. In a state where over 60% of residents support ending prohibition, this raises a critical question: Is this the best use of scarce public resources?

When police are tasked with enforcing an unpopular law, and enforcing it in an inequitable way, what does that do to police community relations? Former Washington, D.C. Police Chief Cathy Lanier stated in 2015 that cannabis arrests only “made people hate us.” Further, Black Pennsylvanians are three times more likely to be arrested for cannabis than white Pennsylvanians despite using cannabis in roughly equal amounts. That fact is not lost on communities. Is legalization the silver bullet to improve police/community relations? No, but it is a solid step toward repairing decades of distrust within a community.

In 2027, Pennsylvania will have the opportunity to finally come together and end cannabis prohibition. The details will need to be worked out, but today I am not here to discuss the best practices of how to bring about a fair and vibrant cannabis industry. I speak to you today to remind this committee of the human costs brought on by decades of prohibition and the steps needed to end this never-ending tragedy that impacts over 10,000 Pennsylvanians every year. You have the power to break this cycle — I hope and pray you seize this opportunity.

Another issue that is consistently brought up is youth usage of cannabis. However, data that was released by both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention² and the National Institute on Drug Abuse via the Monitoring the Future³ survey shows that youth usage drops after legalization. While Pennsylvania has an inconsistent data reporting, we see numbers remaining

¹<https://www.mpp.org/issues/decriminalization/behind-the-times-by-marijuana-policy-project-the-19-states-where-a-joint-can-still-land-you-in-jail/>

²**CDC YRBS Youth current cannabis use (in the past 30 days)**

<https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/#/graphs?questionCode=H46&topicCode=C03&year=2025&location=XX>

³ <https://monitoringthefuture.org/data/bx-by/drug-prevalence/#drug=%22Cannabis%22>

relatively consistent in the 16-19% range for youth reporting cannabis use. In all the states that have legalized and regulated adult-use cannabis, we see that youth use has decreased post-legalization.

Alaska: decreased by 60%
Arizona: decreased by 54%
California: decreased by 67%
Colorado: decreased by 56%
Connecticut: decreased by 55%
Delaware: decreased by 56%
Illinois: decreased by 66%
Maine: decreased by 31%
Maryland: decreased by 39%
Massachusetts: decreased by 52%
Michigan: decreased by 34%
Minnesota: decreased by 56%
Missouri: decreased by 59%
Montana: decreased by 41%
Nevada: decreased by 27%
New Jersey: decreased by 32%
New Mexico: decreased by 58%
New York (excludes NYC): decreased by 36%
Ohio: decreased by 45%
Oregon: decreased by 64%
Rhode Island: decreased by 40%
Vermont: decreased by 28%
Virginia (no sales until 2027): decreased by 55%
Washington: decreased by 56%

Today, and at any other time, I stand ready to answer any questions to help end the criminalization of otherwise law-abiding people.

Respectfully,

Kevin Caldwell
Senior Manager Legislative Affairs
Marijuana Policy Project
kcaldwell@mpp.org
504.208.2488