

New Jersey United for Marijuana Reform supports S2703/A4497 that will legalize marijuana for adult use

New Jersey has a historic opportunity to become the first state to legalize marijuana with legislation that has a clear focus on racial and social justice. S2703/A4497 aims to address the racial disparities in marijuana arrests that amount to a civil rights crisis. New Jersey continues to make record numbers of arrests – over 30,000 annually – for marijuana possession. Black New Jerseyans are arrested at a rate three times higher than white New Jerseyans, despite similar usage rates.

By passing S2703/A4497, we can begin to address the tragic consequences of prohibition, advance racial justice, create job opportunities, and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for reinvestment in our communities. **S2703/A4497 is a historic first step toward remedying the harms of the failed drug war. Here's how:**

Expungements: Erasing a record for a substance that's no longer illegal

The legislation will create an online portal that allows people with marijuana convictions to expedite expungement of their records. The current expungement process is extremely burdensome, sometimes takes over a year to complete, and is costly. In fact, it is strongly recommended to hire an attorney to navigate the process. The bill will create efficiency, waive fees, and allow people to move on with their lives without the devastating impacts of collateral consequences holding them back from reaching their potential.

The bill expunges records of distribution of up to five pounds for an airtight reason: the weight range for a third-degree distribution offense, one of the least serious distribution charges in current law, is between one ounce and five pounds. Aligning the bill with existing provisions in the criminal code is the most efficient and fair way to address expungement.

Vacating sentences and dismissing pending charges

The bill also requires that people with pending charges have their charges either downgraded or dismissed. And, it allows for people who are currently serving sentences– either incarcerated, on probation or parole, or in diversion programs, or those who owe fines or fees – to petition to have those sentences vacated and those charges dismissed.

Non-discrimination for past marijuana convictions

The bill prohibits employers, landlords, occupational licensing boards, and other institutions from discriminating against people with marijuana convictions, and importantly, lays the legal groundwork allowing New Jerseyans to take legal action if they feel they have been discriminated against.



Industry diversity: Ensuring real opportunities for those harmed by the drug war

The bill will create meaningful opportunities for communities hit hardest by marijuana prohibition to contribute in the cannabis industry. The legislation dedicates, to the extent possible, at least 25 percent of licenses specifically for residents of “impact zones” – municipalities with more than 120,000 people, or those communities that have the highest rates of marijuana arrests, crime, and unemployment in the state. Since arrests, crime, and unemployment are inextricably intertwined with race, communities of color will have opportunities to meaningfully participate in the cannabis industry that they may not have otherwise.

To build diversity, the bill creates a business development commission focusing on women, minorities, and disabled veterans, and not less than 30 percent of licenses would be reserved for members of those populations.

Microbusinesses: A boon for small business owners

The bill allots at least 25 percent of licenses to microbusinesses – small businesses that can sell only a limited quantity of cannabis and employ only a certain number of workers. These provisions will benefit small business owners, especially mom-and-pop shops rather than big corporations.

Social justice on the regulatory board and diversity in business development

The bill creates a five-person regulatory commission overseeing the cannabis industry, and at least one member must be a social justice advocate – but the commission could also have additional social justice and racial justice advocates. Emboldening these voices will promote industry oversight that is both just and diverse.

Revenue for reinvestment and municipal priorities

The bill creates a municipal cannabis tax, and towns can distribute funding according to their priorities, while funds collected by the state will go toward the regulatory commission, the expungement process, job-training, and hiring drug recognition experts. We will continue to advocate that the revenue go toward evidence-based social services that help individuals and communities.

The ACLU of New Jersey works to defend and promote liberty throughout the state through litigation, policy advocacy, and community organizing. With over 40,000 members across the state, the ACLU-NJ is the premier civil rights and liberties organization in New Jersey.

New Jersey United for Marijuana Reform (NJUMR) has been advocating for marijuana legalization from a racial and social justice perspective since its founding in 2015.

A partnership of public safety, medical, civil rights, faith, political, and criminal justice reform leaders, NJUMR is committed to changing New Jersey’s laws to legalize, tax, and regulate marijuana for adult use.

