



Tennessee Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

OFFICERS

President

Daniel D. Sumrok, MD, FAAFP, DFASAM

Immediate Past-President

Timothy S. Smyth, MD, FASAM

Secretary

Alexander P. Zotos, MD, FASAM

Treasurer

Christopher D. Marshall, MD, FASAM

February 28, 2023

The Honorable Clay Doggett
Chair
House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice
1st Floor, State Capitol
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: TNSAM's Support for HB309/SB1072

Dear Chair Doggett,

On behalf of the Tennessee Society of Addiction Medicine (TNSAM), the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Tennessee who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic. We write today to express our support for HB309/SB1072. This legislation would decriminalize possession of small, personal use quantities (1 ounce or less) of cannabis and implement a \$25 fine in place of criminal penalties. If the person is under 18 years of age, then the penalty for possession would be shifted to 5 hours community service or completion of a drug awareness program.

Decriminalization of small, personal use quantities of cannabis is a commonsense policy. As of this year, a strong majority of states-- 31 states to be exact-- have decriminalized cannabis possession.ⁱ Decriminalization of cannabis reduces the burden placed upon the criminal-legal system and offers considerable cost savings. Most cannabis arrests are associated with simple possession of cannabis.ⁱⁱ Each arrest for cannabis possession is a costly ordeal. Estimates suggest that an arrest costs about \$1,000, excluding future court fees and incarceration costs.ⁱⁱⁱ The potential savings incurred from cannabis decriminalization can be better used for advancing other public health goals, such as investing in the prevention and treatment of substance use disorder (SUD).

Further, decriminalization of personal use quantities of cannabis acknowledges and addresses decades of evidence detailing the harms of cannabis criminalization. Historically, our nation's punitive approach to cannabis possession caused significant harms related to arrest and incarceration, which disproportionately impact people of limited means and persons of color. For example, while cannabis use rates are relatively similar across racial groups, Black Americans are about four times more likely to be arrested for cannabis than white Americans.^{iv} Additionally, incarceration places considerable strain on all facets of a person's life, creating unnecessary barriers to obtaining employment, public benefits, and housing.^v By decriminalizing cannabis possession, HB309/SB1072 takes a significant step towards righting historical wrongs and ameliorating differential enforcement of cannabis possession laws.

Simply put, continued criminalization of cannabis is an outdated approach that has done more harm than good. **As such, we support HB309/SB1072 and urge members of this committee to**

advance this important and evidence-based legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact sumrokd@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel D Sumrok MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniel D. Sumrok, MD, FAAFP, DFASAM
President, Tennessee Society of Addiction Medicine

CC: The Honorable Scotty Campbell
The Honorable Elaine Davis
The Honorable John Gillespie
The Honorable G.A. Hardaway
The Honorable Dan Howell
The Honorable Bud Hulsey
The Honorable Gloria Johnson
The Honorable William Lamberth
The Honorable Debra O. Moody
The Honorable Lowell Russell
The Honorable Paul Sherrill
The Honorable Joe Towns, Jr.

ⁱ Marijuana Policy Project. (2023). 2023 Cannabis Policy Reform Legislation. Marijuana Policy Project. Retrieved from <https://www.mpp.org/issues/legislation/key-marijuana-policy-reform/>

ⁱⁱ Drug Policy Alliance (2022). Drug War Statistics. Drug Policy Alliance. Retrieved from <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/drug-war-statistics>

ⁱⁱⁱ Chaidez, J. C. (2012). How to Calculate the Cost of a Youth Arrest. <http://www.njjn.org/>. Retrieved from <https://www.njjn.org/our-work/toolkit-how-to-calculate-the-average-costs-of-detaining-a-youth>

^{iv} ACLU. (2020). A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>

^v Jones, M., Coleman, S., & Leierer, S. (2017). Challenges Facing Released Prisoners and People with Criminal Records: A Focus Group Approach. Corrections, 2(2), 91–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23774657.2016.1273079>