

June 26, 2024

The Honorable President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Drug Enforcement Administration
8701 Morrissette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152

Dear President Biden,

We, members of the social work community, write to issue our firm support for the complete descheduling of marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act (CSA). Descheduling is a critical step towards decriminalizing marijuana and undoing the widespread harms caused by marijuana prohibition and criminalization, harms that have disproportionately impacted the communities we serve, such as communities of color and low-income communities. If marijuana remains scheduled under the CSA, the individual and collective suffering caused by prohibition will continue growing.

The criminalization of marijuana has torn apart families, with overwhelmingly disparate impact in communities of color. Approximately 80% of all children in the foster care system are removed from their homes for drug-related causes, an antecedent of punitive policies that disproportionately targeted low-income parents of color during the 1980s.¹ Far from improving welfare, the trauma of family separation can have long lasting impacts on the health and wellbeing of a child. Parental incarceration has been cited as a significant adverse childhood experience, one that is correlated with negative mental health outcomes, educational challenges, and increased likelihood of future drug use.² Recent evidence has also demonstrated that restrictive drug laws directed towards pregnant individuals may in fact worsen health outcomes for the infant.³ Through directing federal funding towards the removal of children, rather than the support of parents, the war on drugs continues to destroy families.

Furthermore, individuals convicted of drug-related offenses are often restricted from accessing essential public benefits, at great cost to them and their households. For instance, federal laws

¹Drug Policy Alliance. *The Drug War Breaks Up Families*. Uprooting The Drug War. (2021, February 16). <https://uprootingthedrugwar.org/child-welfare/>

² Luk, M.S.K., Hui, C., Tsang, S.K.M. *et al.* Physical and Psychosocial Impacts of Parental Incarceration on Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review Differentiating Age of Exposure. *Adolescent Res Rev* **8**, 159–178 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-022-00182-9>

³ Bruzelius, E., Underhill, K., Askari, M., Kajeepeta, S., Bates, L., Prins, S., Jarlenski, M., & Martins, S. (2024, March 14). *Punitive legal responses to prenatal drug use in the United States: A survey of state policies and systematic review of their public health impacts*. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0955395924000653?via%3Dihub>

direct states to ban individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving state welfare aid, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As a result, an individual with a drug-related felony is excluded when calculating household benefits, critically reducing the amount of support the family receives to feed their loved ones.⁴

Marijuana prohibition can also lead a family to lose their home. Federal policies direct public housing units to immediately evict households suspected of drug use, even without an arrest or conviction.⁵ Entire families can be evicted based on suspected drug use from one member of their family, even if the suspected individual does not live with them.⁶ And once convicted of a drug-related charge, individuals can be barred from living in public housing for a minimum of three years, although many face longer bans. Subject to discrimination by private landlords and prohibited from public housing, a drug related charge can greatly increase an individual's chances of becoming unhoused.

The use of marijuana remains a federal crime, despite overwhelming support for widespread legalization. The piecemeal approach towards legalization has created significant disparities in opportunities and outcomes across neighboring states. While communities in legal states can build wealth from legal marijuana sales and benefit from regulations that ensure a safe, unaltered product, other communities are subject to losing their homes, their occupations, their families, and their freedom over the same substance. The disparities in marijuana laws nationwide stand in stark opposition to the 88% of Americans who support legalization.⁷

By virtue of our profession, we have witnessed the grievous harm that marijuana criminalization has caused. Marijuana prohibition and criminalization does not just punish an individual, but through the impact of collateral consequences, they impact their communities and their families. **If marijuana remains scheduled, parents will lose their children, children will lose their homes, and beloved members of our households will be deprived of essential benefits.** As social workers, we are committed to ensuring families are safe and healthy. This is impossible to achieve when draconian punishments for marijuana continue. Until marijuana is descheduled, the harms of the war on drugs will continue to grow.

⁴ *Drug Testing and Crime-Related Restrictions in TANF, SNAP, and Housing Assistance*. Congressional Research Service. (2016, November 28). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42394>

⁵ Drug Policy Alliance. *The Drug War Invades Our Homes*. Uprooting the Drug War. <https://uprootingthedrugwar.org/housing/#:~:text=Once%20someone%20has%20been%20evicted%20for%20drug-related%20activity%2C.at%20least%2012%20states%20impose%20even%20longer%20bans>.

⁶ Drug Policy Alliance. *The Drug War Invades Our Homes*. Uprooting the Drug War. <https://uprootingthedrugwar.org/housing/#:~:text=Once%20someone%20has%20been%20evicted%20for%20drug-related%20activity%2C.at%20least%2012%20states%20impose%20even%20longer%20bans>.

⁷ Green, T. V. (2022, November 22). *Americans overwhelmingly say marijuana should be legal for medical or recreational use*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/11/22/americans-overwhelmingly-say-marijuana-should-be-legal-for-medical-or-recreational-use/>

We call on you to support marijuana descheduling, including federal legislation that addresses our concerns. We also urge you to take executive action to end some of these harms now. This is what our families need to thrive.

Sincerely,

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- 2 Julie Netherland
- 3 Sheila Vakharia
- 4 Brianna Suslovic
- 5 Ashton Santo
- 6 Jillian Bauer-Reese
- 7 Jamee lafratta
- 8 Taylor Bazajou
- 9 Gianna Volkes
- 10 Cameron Rasmussen
- 11 Heidi A.
- 12 Patrick Doyle
- 13 Durrell Washington
- 14 Anne Williamson
- 15 Amanda Reiman
- 16 Claire Rudy
- 17 Lauren Eline
- 18 Tina Fratus
- 19 Jewel Gatling
- 20 Tangee Augustin
- 21 Paolo DeTamaro PhD
- 22 Jo Brocato
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- 24 Emily Pasman
- 25 Myasia Watson
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- 27 Christie Roe
- 28 Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work
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60 Emily George, LCSW, MS.Ed.
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62 Kristi Chastain
63 Leah Plasse
64 MJ (Maleeka Jihad)
65 Willa Beckman
66 Clareese Saunders
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69 Tanesha Grant
70 Amy Hecht
71 Alex Laursen
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85 Elizabeth Van Horn
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87 Julia Jackson
88 Blon Dibbens
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93 Jenna Kress
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96 Caitlin Bergman
97 Mary Chin
98 Nicole Banales
99 Jessica Hunkler
100 Chelsea Higgs Wise
101 rachael randall
102 Mel Wilson
103 Chandler
104 Yvonne Romero
105 Amber Keil
106 Dwane Budheah
107 Robert Benjamin
108 Maria Boncyk
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112 Laurel Hightower
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