



Ending Kentucky's Failed Cannabis Policy

Background:

For more than 50 years, most states – including Kentucky – have criminalized the possession of cannabis. These laws were adopted at a time when the prevailing wisdom was that cannabis had no accepted medical uses and was extremely dangerous to consume in any amount.

Today's status quo and available evidence reveal a different story. There are now [27 states](#) which have decriminalized possession of small amounts of cannabis and [36 states](#) have some form of legal cannabis market. There is also a [growing body](#) of [research](#) showing that marijuana can be an [effective treatment](#) for [certain medical conditions](#) and an admission from experts that it lacks many of the dangers associated with other drugs, such as [fatal overdoses](#).

The Problem:

The Bluegrass State spends more than [\\$50 million](#) in taxpayer money each year to catch and punish [thousands](#) of Kentuckians for the use and sale of cannabis. What have been the outcomes of this investment of trillions in taxpayer money over the past five decades?

- [Trends in marijuana use](#) show no consistent response to these efforts and the prevalence of cannabis use has increased among adults irrespective of these enforcement activities.
- Law enforcement agencies have shifted more and more resources away from their core mission of solving and preventing property and violent crime and toward drug enforcement efforts. Police now arrest someone as a suspect in a [historically low percentage](#) of violent (42 percent) and property (14 percent) crimes – leaving too many victims without justice and jeopardizing public safety.
- The black market for cannabis has continued to thrive in Kentucky. The Drug Enforcement Administration has consistently seized [more than 400,000](#) cannabis plants every year since 2011.

The continued existence of the black market only fuels violent crime and our state's current approach is neither making us safer nor reducing the use of marijuana. After decades of trying the same tactics without different results, it is time for Kentucky to consider a different approach.

The Solution:

Kentucky is one of only 11 states that has not made changes to its cannabis policy. It can learn from other states who have experimented with different approaches. The current research on these early policy experiments shows that [road safety](#), [violent crime](#), [property crime](#), and [youth marijuana use](#) have not been negatively impacted by such policy changes. By decriminalizing small amounts of cannabis our state can refocus law enforcement on its core mission – solving and preventing violent and property crime.