

Pardon Office Seeks Funds for Streamlined Process

PARDON seeks increased funding to hire additional staff for handling growing cannabis pardon applications.

The Office of the Pardon Attorney (PARDON), under the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), has submitted its FY 2025 President's Budget, seeking increased funding. PARDON, responsible for overseeing the executive clemency process, aims to allocate \$12,568,000 to support 40 additional positions, including 26 attorneys, to assist the president in exercising executive clemency powers.

Rising Challenges: The Cannabis Pardon Application Influx

PARDON faces a significant challenge with the growing number of clemency applications, particularly those related to cannabis offenses. Historically, the office received around 600 applications annually, but between FY 2012 and FY 2023, it received a staggering 52,065 applications. With the recent increase in cannabis-related applications, additional resources are urgently needed.

PARDON's Response: Increasing Efficiency and Processing Rate

To address this challenge, PARDON seeks to enhance its efficiency and processing rate for clemency cases. The proposed budget increase would enable PARDON to review pending cases promptly, evaluate capital cases, and handle submissions related to recent presidential proclamations on marijuana offenses.

Goal Setting: Expediting Cannabis Pardon Certificates

PARDON aims to expedite the issuance of marijuana pardon certificates, setting a target of achieving an 80% issuance rate within 30 days of receiving applications in FY 2024.

Policy Context: Biden Administration's Pardon Initiative

The Biden administration has taken significant steps toward cannabis-related pardons. President Biden's October 2022 proclamation initiated the pardon of federal cannabis prisoners, followed by the expansion of the initiative in December 2023. Vice President Kamala Harris has also advocated for cannabis policy reform, emphasizing the need to address the current scheduling of cannabis.

Legislative Calls and State Initiatives

Despite these initiatives, calls for broader cannabis reform persist. Legislators have urged President Biden to fulfill his campaign pledge to decriminalize cannabis federally. State leaders, including Massachusetts Governor Maura T. Healey, continue to advocate for cannabis-related pardons, highlighting the potential impact on thousands of individuals.

Conclusion: Addressing the Complexities of Clemency

As the landscape of cannabis policy evolves, PARDON's budget request underscores the necessity of addressing the surge in cannabis pardon applications. By allocating additional resources, PARDON aims to expedite the review process, fulfill presidential directives, and provide relief to individuals impacted by outdated cannabis laws.

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