

Top Cannabis Group Calls for Unity as Neo-Prohibitionists Rise

Top Cannabis Advocacy Group Urges Collaboration With Industry Amid Rise Of Neo-Prohibitionist Movement

Cannabis Policy Project's Open Letter Warns Industry and Advocates: "Neither Will Succeed Alone"

The Marijuana Policy Project (MPP), one of the nation's leading cannabis reform organizations, has issued a powerful open letter to the cannabis industry urging greater collaboration between advocacy groups and businesses. The call comes at what MPP describes as a pivotal moment, warning that a "resurgent and well-funded neo-prohibitionist movement" is working to undermine legalization progress across the United States.

MPP Executive Director Adam Smith authored the letter, emphasizing that advocacy and industry are two sides of the same movement and must work together if cannabis reform is to be protected and expanded.

"Neither industry nor advocacy will succeed alone," Smith wrote, underscoring that the strength of the movement lies in unity, shared purpose, and independent advocacy that maintains public credibility.

From Grassroots to Green Industry: Remembering the Origins of Cannabis Reform

Smith's letter takes aim at corporate "astroturfing," where industries create artificial grassroots campaigns for profit-driven credibility. He contrasted this with the authentic grassroots origins of the marijuana reform movement, which began decades before any commercial market existed.

"Cannabis advocacy is not astroturf. It wasn't created by an industry," Smith wrote. "In fact, just the opposite. Cannabis policy reform is a movement born out of suffering—the suffering of people whose liberty, children, homes, education, or lives were stolen from them in the name of the war on drugs."

He added that the movement also grew from the struggles of patients seeking cannabis as medicine—people who fought for access to relieve pain, stimulate appetite, and manage seizures when traditional medicine failed them.

This deep history, Smith argues, makes cannabis reform more than a business issue. It remains a human rights and justice movement that challenges decades of discriminatory drug enforcement policies.

A Call to Mend the Divide Between Advocates and Industry

In recent years, tensions have emerged between nonprofit advocacy groups and the growing cannabis industry. As legal markets expanded, philanthropic funding for grassroots reform organizations declined, leaving many advocacy groups struggling financially.

Former MPP executive Matthew Schweich has previously warned that this growing imbalance could threaten the future of reform efforts.

Smith hopes his open letter will reignite collaboration and remind industry leaders that advocacy was—and continues to be—the foundation of cannabis legalization.

“Industry and advocacy are fighting for the same big goal: not just to end cannabis prohibition, but to end it well,” Smith told *Marijuana Moment*. “Patients and consumers need safe, dependable access, which requires an economically stable industry that is rationally regulated, reasonably taxed, and operating within a normalized commercial environment.”

Why the Industry Needs Independent Advocacy to Succeed

Smith stressed that economic arguments alone cannot sustain reform. While the legal cannabis industry contributes jobs, tax revenue, and revitalized economies, these points don’t fully address the moral and public health dimensions of legalization that advocates have championed for decades.

“A strong industry creates jobs and tax revenue,” Smith wrote. “But that cannot finish the job of ending prohibition. Those arguments don’t speak to the deeper issues that first brought this movement together.”

He warned that without independent advocacy, the cannabis industry risks being isolated by prohibitionist forces who exploit profit motives to discredit reform.

“Opponents know that the normal incentives of any industry—reducing costs and maximizing profits—can undercut credibility,” he said. “Their strategy is to force legislators into a false choice between your profit motives and their claim to public health. They want you isolated in that fight.”

The Neo-Prohibitionist Push: A New Threat to Legalization

The MPP letter also highlights growing concerns about organized efforts to roll back cannabis legalization at both the state and national levels.

Smith identified Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM) as a key player in this “neo-prohibitionist” resurgence. SAM and its allies are reportedly backing legislation and preparing ballot initiatives aimed at reversing legalization in certain states—including a potential 2026 ballot measure in Massachusetts to recriminalize adult-use marijuana sales.

Smith warned that these movements are well-funded and politically strategic, positioning themselves as champions of public health while targeting the perceived excesses of the cannabis industry.

“The resurgent prohibitionist movement is real,” Smith cautioned. “They are organizing, fundraising, and working to undo years of hard-fought progress. If the industry fails, we fail together.”

MPP’s Track Record and Continued Mission

Smith’s letter also underscored the Marijuana Policy Project’s long-standing leadership in the cannabis reform movement. MPP has been instrumental in helping to pass 29 state medical and adult-use legalization laws, working both through legislatures and ballot initiatives.

The organization continues to push for legalization in Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire, while also helping to defend and improve existing cannabis laws.

Smith emphasized that advocacy groups like MPP do not work for the industry—but their independence is vital to the overall success of cannabis normalization.

“Cannabis advocacy organizations do not work for the industry, and it’s true that we will not always align or collaborate on every issue,” he said. “But our independence is a feature, not a bug. It’s what gives us credibility and increases our power over time.”

A Renewed Call for Strategic Alignment and Support

At the heart of the open letter is a call for renewed partnership between advocacy organizations and the cannabis business community. Smith urged industry leaders to recommit to supporting independent reform groups through financial backing, strategic collaboration, and open communication.

“There’s a real urgency to develop a deeper, coordinated conversation between the leaders of industry and institutions of independent advocacy about how we move forward together,” the letter states.

“That means renewed financial support, yes,” Smith added. “But it also means better strategic alignment across our common goals and shared purpose as we confront our common challenges.”

He concluded with a challenge to industry leaders: “Maybe you didn’t even realize it was happening. So it wasn’t your responsibility to step up. But now you know. So now it is.”

The Future of Cannabis Reform Depends on Unity

The Marijuana Policy Project’s message is clear—the cannabis movement cannot afford to be divided. As opponents regroup and states face new threats of recriminalization, the strength of reform efforts will depend on coordinated action between the advocacy and industry sectors.

Cannabis reform has always been about more than profit, it’s about justice, public health, and individual freedom. As Smith reminded both advocates and business leaders, the mission remains unfinished, and success will require collective commitment.

If the cannabis industry and advocacy groups can find common ground once again, the movement’s next chapter could be one of resilience, progress, and unity standing together against a new wave of prohibitionist opposition.

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