

Activists Urge Sharing Arrest Stories to Highlight Drug Laws

Cannabis Policy Advocates Launch Push to Collect Arrest Stories Ahead of 4/20, Citing Need to Highlight “True Impact” of Prohibition

As the unofficial marijuana holiday known as 420 cannabis holiday approaches, a leading pro-legalization organization is calling on the public to share personal accounts of cannabis-related arrests, arguing that firsthand stories are essential to illustrating what it describes as “the true impact of the ongoing scourge of prohibition.”

The Marijuana Policy Project says the effort is part of an upcoming report on marijuana enforcement in the United States, and that compiling statistical data alone is not enough to capture the human consequences of prohibition.

Advocacy Group Seeks Personal Narratives to Complement Arrest Data in Upcoming National Report on Cannabis Enforcement

In an email sent to supporters, the Marijuana Policy Project said it is preparing to publish a new analysis of cannabis arrests nationwide and is encouraging individuals affected by enforcement actions to submit their experiences.

According to the group, it is “vitally important” that the report goes beyond raw enforcement statistics and instead includes “real human stories that illustrate the harmful impact that prohibition and criminalization have on individuals, families, and communities.”

To facilitate submissions, the organization is directing participants to an online form where they can describe cannabis-related law enforcement encounters, including whether they are comfortable being identified by name in the final report.

Online Submission Campaign Invites Details on Arrests, Legal Consequences and Long-Term Personal Impact

The form encourages respondents to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, including what occurred during and after any arrest, as well as the broader effects of criminalization on their lives.

It also invites submissions from individuals who were not personally arrested but have witnessed or been affected by enforcement actions involving friends or family members.

The initiative is designed to build a qualitative record of enforcement outcomes alongside statistical data, with organizers emphasizing the emotional and social consequences of marijuana-related arrests.

Data Shows Hundreds of Thousands of Marijuana Arrests Persist Annually Despite Legalization Trends in Some States

While cannabis legalization has expanded across the United States in recent years, enforcement activity remains significant.

The organization cited federal data indicating that nearly 188,000 people were arrested for marijuana possession in 2024, along with an additional 16,000 arrests tied to alleged cultivation or distribution.

Altogether, marijuana accounted for 27 percent of all drug possession arrests nationwide—more than any other individually listed substance.

Advocates argue that these figures demonstrate that cannabis enforcement continues to play a central role in broader drug policing efforts, particularly in states that have not legalized adult-use cannabis.

State-Level Analysis Shows Cannabis Still Dominates Drug Arrests in Several Regions

An analysis of federal arrest data by the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws found that marijuana remains a major driver of drug-related arrests in many states where cannabis remains illegal.

In several states, including Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Nebraska and Wisconsin, marijuana accounted for more than half of all drug arrests in the past year.

In additional states such as Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming, cannabis represented more than 40 percent of drug-related arrests.

The analysis also found that in states including Alabama, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Wyoming, more than 97 percent of cannabis-related arrests were for possession rather than trafficking or distribution.

Advocates Say Arrest Data Alone Does Not Capture Broader Social and Personal Consequences of Cannabis Criminalization

Supporters of reform argue that while arrest statistics provide a quantitative snapshot of enforcement, they fail to reflect the broader human consequences associated with criminal records, court involvement and long-term stigma.

The Marijuana Policy Project says its storytelling initiative is intended to fill that gap by documenting lived experiences that illustrate how cannabis laws affect education, employment, housing and family stability.

Organizers say these narratives can help policymakers better understand the real-world implications of enforcement decisions as debates over legalization continue in state legislatures.

NORML Launches Parallel Effort to Gauge Public Sentiment on Cannabis Policy Experiences

In a separate but related effort, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws is encouraging cannabis consumers to participate in a survey assessing their experiences with cannabis laws and access.

The survey is designed to capture “real-time sentiment” from individuals in the United States and beyond, offering insight into how people perceive cannabis policy in their daily lives.

Together, these initiatives reflect a broader strategy among advocacy groups to combine statistical enforcement data with personal testimony as public debate over cannabis legalization continues to evolve across the country.

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