

# Ben & Jerry's Continues Advocacy for Cannabis Legalization and Justice

Ben & Jerry's teamed up American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and AZ Justice Project to celebrate this year's 4/20 cannabis holiday and to spread one message: Legalization without justice is half-baked.

## Partnership Background

Two years ago, in a joint effort with the ACLU, Ben and Jerry's demanded the Senate pass cannabis justice legislation. Last year, the company's co-founder Ben Cohen launched a non-profit cannabis line, Ben's Best Blnz or B3, to help right the wrong of the War on Drugs, with 100% of the profits benefiting minority-owned cannabis operations. Benzinga wanted to learn more about the impact of these actions, so we reached out to Palika Makam, activism lead at Ben & Jerry's.

## Localized Campaign Focus

"Every 4/20, we focus our efforts on one particular state or issue in addition to our national call to action," Makam told Benzinga. "Last year we turned our attention to Michigan. This year, after advocates in Arizona reached out to us for support, we decided to zero in on the state for our localized campaign. Though Arizona voted to legalize cannabis use and expungement in 2020, there are still at least 200,000 people with cannabis convictions on their records who have not accessed expungement tools."

## AZ Justice Project Partnership

Makam highlighted how criminal records block access to jobs, housing, education, economic opportunity, and civic participation that enable individuals to prosper in their communities. Even though Arizona voted for expungements, "the process is confusing, long, and requires legal aid," she says, adding that's the reason Ben & Jerry's has partnered with AZ Justice Project to push elected country prosecutors to file for expungement on behalf of their constituents. This is "a much easier and effective process to clear cannabis convictions and allow people in Arizona to access full lives."

## Digital Activism Impact

Speaking of previous cannabis activism, Makam says "It's been important for us to utilize our brand and voice to help shift 4/20 from a purely stoner culture celebration to a tentpole moment to fight for cannabis and racial justice. Over the past 3 years, we have been able to drive more than 100,000 total digital actions and reach over 158M fans."

## Call to Action

Those who want to join the fight and enact change can use the autofill letter template to governors linked [HERE](#) and on the Ben & Jerry's website as part of its 4/20 campaign. "It's an easy but effective way to get involved," Makam points out.

## **Cannabis Justice Goals**

Even though 24 states have legalized the recreational use of cannabis, only eleven states and the District of Columbia have automatic expungement policies that clear people's records of cannabis convictions, Makam points out. What's more, there are still people behind bars for marijuana-related convictions, even in those states where the plant has been legalized, and what's worse the penalties were not equally served.

“Retail cannabis sales are projected to hit \$57 billion in the next few years, but people with cannabis convictions on their record are struggling to get jobs or loans or find jobs. In order to truly achieve cannabis justice, we have to keep fighting to ensure people are no longer haunted by their convictions by advocating for automatic expungement laws, emptying our jails and prisons of anyone incarcerated for a cannabis-related offense, and continuing to chip away at the entrenched systemic racism that allows for the disproportionate arrests and convictions of Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color. We will not stop doubling down on cannabis justice until we have legalization AND justice,” Makam concluded.

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