

California Law Enforcement Embraces Legalization of Cannabis

California's pot farmers have found an unexpected ally: the police. After years of opposing cannabis legalization, the state's most powerful law enforcement group is now supporting it, marking a significant shift in cannabis politics.

PORAC's Transformational Support

Earlier this month, the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC), representing over 80,000 officers through 950 police unions, announced its support for marijuana legalization and legal cannabis businesses.

"The ship has sailed," PORAC stated in a policy position released earlier this month, advocating for federal cannabis legalization, "and for the vast majority of Americans, cannabis is legal and accessible."

Backing the STATES 2.0 Act

This announcement coincided with PORAC's support for the STATES 2.0 Act, a congressional bill that would force the federal government to recognize state-legal cannabis programs. The bill also promises significant financial benefits for legal cannabis companies.

PORAC President Brian Marvel told SFGATE that the bill would facilitate federal and local law enforcement collaboration to combat illicit cannabis operations and support legal pot farms.

"We're not making a moral judgment as to whether you should smoke it or don't smoke it, but we want to make sure legal cannabis companies aren't being drowned out by the illegal market," Marvel said to SFGATE.

Financial and Legal Implications

If approved, the STATES 2.0 Act could reduce federal taxes on the legal industry and allow California pot businesses to export their products across state lines, a major aspiration within the legal industry.

Shifting Opinions on Cannabis

PORAC, the largest law enforcement group in California and the largest statewide police group in the country, originally opposed Proposition 64, the 2016 initiative that legalized marijuana in California. However, the group's stance has evolved as cannabis became more normalized among California officers.

"A fair amount of officers patrolling the streets nowadays know nothing other than legalized marijuana in the state of California," Marvel explained. "They are much more receptive to conversations on marijuana."

Benefits of Federal Involvement

Marvel noted that federal prohibition currently forces local law enforcement to handle the majority of illegal cannabis operations. Ending federal prohibition would allow federal officers to assist, enabling local police to address other crimes more effectively.

Funding for Enforcement and Regulation

The STATES 2.0 Act proposes a new federal tax on cannabis to fund regulations and enforcement. Additional funds for law enforcement were a key reason PORAC supported the bill.

Broader Support and Environmental Concerns

PORAC's support for the STATES 2.0 Act was echoed by Oregon's statewide law enforcement group, marking the first time a statewide law enforcement group has supported a pathway to federal legalization.

Marvel emphasized the importance of shutting down illegal pot farms due to the environmental damage they cause. "We really need to do everything in our power to eradicate the illegal grows in California," he said.

Changing Views on Cannabis Use

Views on marijuana are shifting across the country and within law enforcement. New police recruits in California are no longer questioned about past cannabis use, following a new law banning workplace discrimination based on such use. PORAC is also advocating for research to determine the safety of cannabis use by active police officers during non-work hours.

Future of Drug Policy Reform

Marvel indicated that the group's evolving perspective on cannabis extends to psychedelic reform, with PORAC members showing interest in the safe use of psychedelics rather than outright bans.

"Let's not bury our heads in the sand and just say 'No no no, we're going to be doing pure enforcement,' when the reality is we should be focusing on violent crimes and making our communities safer," Marvel concluded

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