

## Alaska (2022): HB 246, Testimony in support of record sealing for low-level marijuana convictions

My name is Jax James and I serve as the State Policy Manager for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). I would like to thank the House Finance Committee for considering House Bill 246. NORML is supportive of legislative efforts to ensure record expungement for individuals impacted by the prohibition of marijuana/cannabis.

House Bill 246 would seal the records of those low-level crimes from nine certain types of criminal history background checks, thus reducing barriers to employment and increasing the likelihood of people convicted of low-level crimes to become contributing members of society.

Passage of this legislation will make it so that low-level cannabis offenders are no longer stigmatized and disenfranchised by the collateral consequences of an arrest record for an incident that is no longer a crime. In addition to limiting employment, education, and other opportunities, a criminal record can impose significant psychological and emotional burdens. The stigma of carrying a criminal record dampens an individual's capacity to form positive visions of their own full potential.

It is of the utmost importance that Alaska lawmakers prioritize the process of expungement so as to support Alaskans unjustly harmed by the war on drugs. People with otherwise clean records do not deserve for the rest of their life to be derailed because of a previous cannabis conviction that would not have been prosecuted today.

Those who responsibly consume conventional medications or alcohol while off the job do not suffer sanctions from their employers unless their work performance is adversely impacted. Employers should fairly consider those who have a prior conviction, need access to their medicine, or consume cannabis legally while away from the workplace in a similar manner.

Changes in the legal status of cannabis have not been shown to adversely impact workplace safety. For example, a pair of studies from 2016 find that legalization is associated with greater workforce participation and with fewer workplace absences. A 2020 Occupational Medicine report found "no association" between cannabis use and work-related accidents or injuries.

Alaskans deserve the chance to seek out employment, education, and other opportunities despite prior low-level convictions for a botanical plant that is no longer criminalized. NORML urges Alaska lawmakers to thoughtfully consider and pass HB 246 to ensure that individuals have this chance and can live without the burden and stigma of a criminal record.