



House Bill 28 Provides Justice for Those Harmed by Marijuana Prohibition

Despite being an early leader on cannabis reform, Alaska lags other states when it comes to mitigating the harms done by marijuana prohibition. Seven years after legalization, many Alaskans are still saddled with criminal records for low-level marijuana possession. Twenty-four other states have already adopted reforms that facilitate the expungement or sealing of marijuana-related criminal convictions.

Too often, low-level offenses come with a lifelong punishment.

- In the interest of public safety, it may sometimes be necessary to track and provide information to the public about an individual's criminal history. But there is no evidence that individuals convicted only for marijuana possession pose a credible threat to public safety.
- A one-size-fits all approach of lifelong criminal records simply doesn't make sense, especially considering that marijuana possession is no longer considered a crime in Alaska.

Criminal records can make it virtually impossible to participate as a productive member of society.

- Releasing conviction records for low-level offenses can actually undermine public safety by making it harder for people with criminal backgrounds to remain on the right side of the law.
- Individuals with criminal records face significant difficulty engaging in productive activities, such as finding a job, securing housing, obtaining occupational licenses, joining the military, gaining admission to universities, accessing financial services, and maintaining child custody.
- Nearly 90% of employers nationwide conduct background checks on job applicants
- Research suggests that job applicants with criminal convictions are approximately 50% less likely to receive a callback.

House Bill 28 is a small but necessary step toward justice in Alaska.

- The legislation would prohibit agencies from releasing criminal records related to cases where a defendant was convicted for possessing less than one ounce of marijuana, but only if the defendant requests that the records not be released.
- The Alaska Court System would also be prohibited from posting records from these cases on publicly accessible websites.
- While being a relatively small step compared to the actions of other post-prohibition states, HB28 will provide much needed relief to many vulnerable Alaskans.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY CONTACT

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