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Support SB 686 – Ensure a commonsense response to the possession of marijuana by adults

SB 686 would decriminalize marijuana possession for adults.

The War on Marijuana wastes time and money. Despite being a top priority for police departments for years, the aggressive enforcement of marijuana laws has failed to eradicate or even diminish the use of marijuana. In 2010, Virginia spent \$67,244,864 on marijuana possession enforcement. The 18,756 marijuana possession arrests in 2010 involved a judge, a clerk, deputies, and prosecutors all on the taxpayer's dime. And, the number of arrests continues to increase. These valuable resources could be better spent on measures that keep communities safe, investigating serious and often unsolved crimes, and reinvested into public health programs, including drug treatment. It's time to end this failed war.

The War on Marijuana is enforced along color lines. While African Americans and whites use marijuana at roughly equal rates, in 2010 African Americans were 2.8 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession in Virginia. And, in many areas of Virginia it was even worse for African Americans. In Fairfax and Loudoun for example, African Americans were approximately three times more likely to be arrested for possession. In Arlington, African Americans were almost eight times more likely to be arrested. Marijuana prohibition has disproportionately harmed communities of color.

The War on Marijuana needlessly ensnares people in the criminal justice system. Marijuana prohibition imposes arbitrary, often harsh penalties for private conduct for which no criminal penalty is appropriate and imposes all of the hardships of an arrest, arrest record, and often a prison term on otherwise law-abiding people. The personal cost to those arrested is often significant and can linger for years. When people are arrested for possessing even tiny amounts of marijuana, it can affect their public housing and student financial aid eligibility, employment opportunities, and child custody determinations. The War on Marijuana has needlessly ensnared tens of thousands of Virginians in the criminal justice system, at tremendous human and financial cost.

SB 686 would create a fairer, more compassionate, and smarter response to drug dependency and improve our health and safety.