

Why should Arlington County Civic Federation (ACCF) propose a resolution about medical marijuana to the General Assembly

By Andy Ludwig, Director NoVA NORML; member of ACCF Legislative Committee; and ACCF NORML Delegate

While most of the country has been swept up in the tide of relaxing laws relating to marijuana(1), Virginia – and Arlington in particular – has bucked the trend(2).

Arlington has seen arrests for marijuana possession INCREASE 80+% in the past 4 years(3) -- the highest of any city in Virginia – wrecking the lives & future of 500+ Arlingtonians each year. This costs residents roughly \$2M in tax payer money(4), and draws resources from policing, prosecuting and punishing much more severe crimes, where an external party is actually affected.

The worst part is that we know prohibition doesn't work. And minorities are suffering the worst – eight times more likely to be arrested for simple possession (5). Even though 86% of Virginians would like access to medical marijuana(6), to treat chronic pain, seizures, sleep difficulties, Alzheimer's, diabetes, cancer, PTSD, and much more (7) – Virginia has some of the harshest criminal penalties in the country for possessing something that is objectively safer than **legal** alcohol or tobacco (8).

Even the federal government's National Cancer Institute recognizes cannabis for what it is – a medicine. While it's legal to grow in DC (but not sell), some states are taxing & regulating it, offering relief to millions, and generating enough tax revenue for a new school each year (9).

Perhaps most importantly, those states are not wrecking the lives of 500+ residents (and their families) each year – especially returning veterans, who find cannabis to be the best treatment for their PTSD.

Virginians can only change their laws through their lawmakers. Particular members of the General Assembly are not aware of this information, which is certain to sway their viewpoint if they care about the health of their constituents. Please support this resolution so that Arlington County can help lead the way in promoting a healthier and safer Virginia.

(1) HuffingtonPost.com 12/23/15 [The Top 10 Marijuana Policy Victories of 2015](#)

(2) WashingtonPost.com 10/28/15 "[Virginia ramps up its war on pot – and the arrests show a disturbing racial divide](#)" Nationally, marijuana possession arrests *decreased* 6.5% while they *increased* 76% in Virginia from 2003 to 2014.

(3) "[Racial Disparities in Marijuana Arrests in Virginia \(2003-2013\)](#)." Drug Policy Alliance study by Jon Gettman, Shenandoah University. P. 5 516 Arlington marijuana possession arrests represent an increase of 81% from 2011 to 2013.

(4) WashingtonPost.com 10/28/15 "[Virginia ramps up its war on pot – and the arrests show a disturbing racial divide](#)" The ACLU [conservatively estimates](#) Virginia spent \$67M on marijuana enforcement in 2010 for 18,697 arrests. In 2013, 21,684 arrests were

made, likely at a cost of \$77.7M (or above, with inflation). Arlington arrests represent 516/21,684 or 2.4% of this figure = \$1.85M

(5) (3) "[Racial Disparities in Marijuana Arrests in Virginia \(2003-2013\)](#)." Drug Policy Alliance study by Jon Gettman, Shenandoah University, p.5. The arrest ratio for black residents to white residents is 7.8 in Arlington County, despite similar usage rates.

(6) Quinnipiac University. Quinnipiac University Poll. 4/4/15. "[With Big Age, Party Gaps, Iowa Voters Split On Marijuana, Quinnipiac University Swing State Poll Finds; Colorado, Virginia Voters Back Recreational Pot](#)" 86% of Virginians support the legal use of marijuana for medical purposes. 54% of Virginians support legalization of marijuana for personal use.

(7) National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. Accessed 12/20/15.

"[Recent Research on Medical Marijuana](#)." A review of the scientific literature shows marijuana can treat PTSD, epilepsy, Alzheimer's, mS, HIV, diabetes, arthritis and more.

(8) Heretohelp : Mental health and substance use information you can trust. Accessed 12/20/15. "[Cannabis, Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Canada](#)" The health costs to the user are eight times higher for drinkers than they are for cannabis users, and 40 times higher for tobacco smokers.

Centers for Disease Controls. FastStats : [Deaths and Mortality](#). Table 10 : Number of Deaths from 113 selected causes... drug-induced causes, alcohol induced causes...

(from 2013 data) Accessed 12/20/15. Alcohol-induced deaths : 29,001

DrugWarFacts.Org "[Annual Causes of Death in the United States](#)" Accessed 12/20/15.

Using 2010 data: Deaths related to tobacco : "more than 480,000 deaths each year".

Deaths related to alcohol : 25,692. Deaths related to prescription drugs : 22,134.

Deaths related to cannabis : 0.

(1) (8, alternate): Scientific Reports. 1/30/15. "[Comparative risk assessment of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other illicit drugs using the margin of exposure approach](#)." Objectively compares the harms of various drugs and determines alcohol to be the most dangerous.

(2) IFLscience.com. Accessed 9/20/16. "[New Study Finds Marijuana Safer Than Alcohol or Tobacco](#)." Discusses results of study mentioned in (5) to a science-oriented audience.

(3) Washington Post. 2/23/15. "[Marijuana may be even safer than previously thought, researchers say](#)." Discusses the results of the study mentioned in (5) to a non-scientific audience.

(9) As cited by Andrew Freedman, Director, Marijuana coordination Office, Office of the Governor, Denver, Colorado at the [Virginia State Bar Annual Conference in Virginia Beach](#) during the "Showcase CLE II: Budding Issues : The Changing Marijuana Landscape", June 19, 2015.

Also: TheCannabist.co "[Colorado's pot tax for schools sets record in May, crushes 2014 totals](#)". 7/13/15. Between January and May of 2015, the Colorado pot tax collected \$13.6 million for school construction projects.