



Welcome to SMARTNews, part of the Start SMART NY campaign to reform New York's marijuana laws. Start SMART NY is supported by a coalition convened by the Drug Policy Alliance and comprised of various groups and organizations dedicated to ending marijuana prohibition. We will be your monthly source of news and events related to the campaign.

## Campaign Updates

- The Marijuana Possession Sealing Bill (A.2142 - Peoples-Stokes / S.3809 - Bailey), which will seal low-level possession arrests that were largely the product of stop and frisk encounters, passed the New York State Assembly! Advocates convened in Albany to push the Senate and Governor to act swiftly. [See the story here.](#) And click [here](#) and [here](#) for stories of people being directly impacted by their lack of action.
- Governor Andrew Cuomo believes marijuana is a "gateway drug"? [The overwhelming research says it's not.](#) Yet, in a recent interview the Governor stated that, while he fully supports access to medical marijuana, he believes recreational access should remain prohibited. [Read Dr. Julie Holland's response.](#)
- Assemblymember Crystal Peoples-Stokes (Buffalo) hosted a workshop on marijuana legalization and how it can be a vehicle for social, economic, racial, and criminal justice reform at the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus Weekend. [See more here.](#)

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# Marijuana Stat of the Month

# 80%

## ARRESTED ARE BLACK OR LATINO

In 2016, 80% of the 22,656 people arrested for low-level marijuana possession across New York State were Black or Latino, despite only representing 36% of the state's population and using marijuana at similar rates as other populations.



## Beyond the Numbers

Each month, this newsletter will share personal stories from people who are being directly impacted by New York's marijuana policies. Their full names will not be included.



**Rochester, New York** - Jason was just about through his shift at a mall department store when he decided that work was slow enough for him to step outside for a smoke break. On that particular break, he was joined by a friend of his from the neighborhood who had been hanging out at the mall that day. They left the mall together and proceeded to Jason's car where he had a few grams of marijuana.

Thinking that one joint wouldn't hurt him, Jason and his friend began to smoke inside of Jason's car. They were quickly joined by mall security and, soon after, the police. "I knew the way they approached the car that they meant business," Jason said. The police immediately removed Jason from the car, handcuffed him, and sat him down on the curb in front of the mall entrance. They asked for his identification, which he provided, and then began to explain to him that they saw him stalking around the mall's premises on the security camera and knew "he was up to no good."

Jason refuted the claim that he was stalking and continued to reiterate that he was a mall employee and wasn't up to anything. It wasn't until there was a brief pause in his interrogation that Jason realized that his friend who had been caught smoking in the car right next to him was having a very different experience. "Are you OK?" "Did he try to hurt you in any way?" "Was he trying to sell you drugs?" These were the questions his friend was being asked before officers called his friend's father to come pick him up from the location.

Jason was confused that two people doing the exact same thing could be treated differently by law enforcement. "I knew I shouldn't have been smoking but I really couldn't believe they just let him go like that. No handcuffs. No nothing." Jason assumed his custody would end in a similar fashion with some type of warning. Instead, Jason was brought down to the station and booked for possession with intent to sell. Jason's friend is white – he is not.

Because he had maintained steady employment, Jason was able to bail himself out and began the process to fight for his innocence which he could only describe as a “nightmare.”

Soon after Jason was released, he was banned from entrance into the mall, physically preventing him from going to work. On his first court date, he was asked to plea to the charge of possession with an intent to sell. He refused. After failing to follow up with the Court, he was later re-arrested during a traffic stop near the mall for an open warrant stemming from this incident. Once again he was asked to plea to the charge, declined, and bailed himself out. But this time his car was seized in the process.

Jason pleaded with mall security to at least allow him to go to work so that he could keep a stream of income. They allowed him to do so but restricted his visit to only the store that he worked in and would follow him daily as he entered and exited the mall before and after his shift. After relying for some time on his family to give him rides to and from the mall, Jason was forced to quit his job.

“I just don’t understand how or why they could just derail someone’s life for marijuana. It made no sense to me and I hope other people don’t have experiences like the one I had to deal with.”



## **Why is marijuana legalization a SMART choice for New York?**

“Legalization of marijuana is the SMART choice for New York because it would finally end the hypocrisy of mostly older, mostly white, and mostly male elected officials of the State continuing to demonize and vilify people who use marijuana today for actions they themselves likely took when they were younger and less inhibitive. That hypocritical duality of escaping arrest by the din of luck – or lack of melanin – on the one hand, but insisting that antiquated prohibitionist modalities must continue to exist on the other, is an affront to a society that cherishes freedom and equality.  
#ProhibitionDoesntWork”

**Juan Cartagena, President & General Counsel, Latino Justice**



## Featured Event

**Film Screening and Discussion:** 13th Screening Sponsored by the Cannabis Cultural Association, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and the Drug Policy Alliance

Join us for this [FREE screening of Ava Duvernay's award winning film, 13th](#). The film will be followed by a student-led discussion on the impacts of the war on drugs.

New York University Global Center  
Grand Hall 5th Floor  
238 Thompson Street, New York, NY 10012  
March 20th, 6pm - 8:30pm

For more information, contact Leland Radovanic at [lradovanovic@wearecannabisculture.com](mailto:lradovanovic@wearecannabisculture.com)

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**Learn about more upcoming events related to marijuana reform**

# Get Involved

**Marijuana Prohibition is coming to an end - [join the fight](#).**

For more information, contact Chris Alexander at [calexander@drugpolicy.org](mailto:calexander@drugpolicy.org)





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