



The Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts

Testimony of Whitney A. Taylor, Executive Director Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts — June 27, 2005

In Favor of S. 1151 — An Act to Impose a Civil Fine for the Possession of Marijuana in front of the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Committee

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identification purposes only.*

Honorable Chairs and Committee Members, I am here to testify in favor of the late Senator Shannon's bill S. 1151 on the decriminalization of simple marijuana possession. This legislation will be of great benefit to the Commonwealth and supported is by the vast majority of Bay Staters.

First, while individuals who are convicted of marijuana possession charges are not normally sentenced to jail time, they are set up to be punished for life. With a conviction on their record, simple marijuana possession offenders are subject to all of the restraints placed on convicted felons under current state and federal laws, including the Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) statute that is currently being examined by this legislative body. Persons convicted of marijuana possession are ***Ineligible*** for: Government student loans and scholarships; many forms of Military Service; and the majority of Local, State and Federal Jobs. Persons convicted of simple marijuana possession are also at risk for losing their right to vote, the custody of their children, as well as driver's and any other professional licenses.

Second, Massachusetts voters are READY and want this type of reform in our state. In the November 2000, 2002 and 2004 elections Massachusetts residents in 28 Representative and Senatorial districts had the opportunity to vote on whether or not their legislators should vote in favor of marijuana decriminalization. This measure passed in every single district with an average margin of 63% of the vote. The citizens of Massachusetts have spoken out in favor of marijuana decriminalization.

Third, marijuana has already been decriminalized in 11 other U.S. states — with NO negative affect. California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Oregon have all decriminalized personal possession of marijuana — with Alaska recently debating this issue and continuing their policy of allowing personal possession of up to 4 ounces of marijuana. Additionally, California has estimated its savings under marijuana decriminalization at \$100 Million per year.

Finally, marijuana decriminalization will create huge savings in the Commonwealth's law enforcement and judicial budgets. According to Dr. Jeffery Miron, Visiting Professor of Economics at Harvard University's conservative estimate, marijuana decriminalization will save Massachusetts at LEAST \$24.3 million a year. These savings could be doubled, depending on the economic model used.

I urge the good members of this Committee to support S. 1151 — this legislation will prove beneficial to Massachusetts both in human and fiscal savings. Thank you for the opportunity to present on this important subject.

101 Tremont St., #509
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 426-7979
www.dpfma.org
info@dpfma.org