

Statements by Iowa Elected Officials Supporting Marijuana Reform January 6, 2020

Statement by Black Hawk County Supervisor Chris Schwartz

“Legalization of marijuana in Iowa is the morally just, financially responsible, popular, and pro-growth action that the Iowa legislature must take.

It is morally just because since the very start of the war on pot it has ripped families apart, sent families into economic ruin, and blocked economic and educational opportunities for people unfortunate enough to get caught. All of this happens disapprovingly to black and brown individuals making it a large part of the institutionalized racism we must dismantle on our state. Here in Waterloo, Iowa’s most diverse city it has been a decades long ongoing injustice that simply must stop.

It is the financially responsible thing to do because we currently waste insane sums of money investigating, arresting, and prosecuting individuals for marijuana crimes while at the same time forcing people into an untaxed, unregulated black market. These wasted expenditures and untapped revenue create a huge burden on local governments especially counties and cities at the cost of actual priorities like mental health, conservation, recreation, education, economic development, and infrastructure.

It is the popular thing to do that is supported by everyday Iowans of every political stripe and demographic background. If Iowa were a ballot initiative state legalization would have already taken place because that is the will of the voters. Instead, we must depend on the courage of those they elect to represent them.

It is the pro-growth thing to do. The fact is that Iowa is not growing fast enough, and our states young people are leaving in droves. Waterloo for example needs around 8,000 more individuals to support the infrastructure of our city who has not yet reach the population height it had in the 1980’s before the farm crisis. The ability to purchase, grow, and recreationally consume marijuana is a serious quality of life issue, as is the desire of young people to live in forward thinking progressive communities.

In this new world of virtual workspaces where more and more folks have the ability remotely work from anywhere in the country Iowa, with our affordable and often historic housing stock, and our good schools could be positioned to attract and retain more and more of these families, but not without progressive reforms including marijuana legalization.

Legalization must happen and it must happen soon or Iowa will be left behind in a future dominated by progressive change.”

Statement by Linn County Supervisor Stacey Walker

“Over half the states in the union have some form of legalized cannabis. If we follow suit here in Iowa and fully legalize marijuana, we can make progress on multiple fronts. We can add millions of dollars of revenue to the state coffers. We can create new jobs in production, retail, and logistics, boosting an economy ravaged by the global pandemic. We would also save precious resources in our criminal legal system, cutting down on court backlogs and allowing law enforcement officials to focus on actual crime. We would further the cause of racial justice. And finally, we could introduce a new and sustainable market for our farmers who lead the world in innovation and production.

It’s time we join our neighbors and a majority of other states and share in the new economy of the cannabis industry. I am proud to stand with a growing list of officials from around the state calling for meaningful change on marijuana drug policy in Iowa.

This is a Green New Deal we can all support.”

Statement by Des Moines City Council member Josh Mandelbaum

“I want to thank Senators Bolcom and Peterson for organizing today’s event. I also want to thank my fellow elected officials who have signed on to this effort.

In June, I co-sponsored a resolution to create a marijuana task force in Des Moines. We created the task force because we know that criminalization of marijuana has not had an impact on marijuana usage, but it has created additional costs for communities and individuals. We created the task force because we know that an arrest for possession of marijuana can have an impact on housing, student loans, future employment, child custody determinations and more.

We created the task force because we know that there is a significant racial disparity in the way our marijuana laws are enforced. In Iowa, a black person is over 7 times more likely to get arrested for marijuana possession than a white person despite data showing marijuana usage is roughly the same among blacks and whites. We created the task force because our community has been pleading with us to address this disparity.

The Marijuana Task Force provided a succinct overview of the legal limitations that current state law imposes. The Task Force provided a series of recommendations broken down by state policies the Council should support and local actions the Council can take. These recommendations can be a roadmap for Des Moines and other communities in our state, and I support implementing the full set of recommendations.

The most important taskforce recommendation is why we are here today. The taskforce recommended that the Council support and work towards state legislation to legalize marijuana possession. The best way to solve this issue is to solve it statewide for everyone impacted. I am proud to be joined by several of my colleagues on the Council to support this work.

Legalizing marijuana is one important way to move towards racial justice and create a community and state that works better for everyone. We look forward to having more elected officials join us in this fight.”

Statement by Senator Joe Bolcom, Iowa City

“Marijuana prohibition has been a costly failure. It is ending across America because it has caused far more harm than good.

It has broken up too many families, upended too many livelihoods, thrown too many children into poverty and has taken a lifetime financial toll on too many Iowans.

Over the decades, tens of thousands of Iowans have suffered irreparable economic and social harm from a criminal marijuana possession conviction. For too many, it has paved the way for a lifetime of economic insecurity. In 2019 alone, more than 5,000 Iowans were convicted of marijuana possession.

Iowa taxpayers are on the hook for tens of millions annually for this failure. Taxpayers pay twice. They pay higher local property taxes as they pick up an enormous financial tab for an unfair policing and criminal justice system. And, they pay higher state taxes for the cost of the social safety net to support thousands of families that deal with the economic calamity resulting from an arrest or a criminal record.

In the upcoming legislative session bills will be introduced in both the Iowa House and Senate to end this economic and social turmoil.

One bill will establish a framework like we see in 15 other states, home to 1 in 3 Americans, that have chosen to regulate marijuana like they regulate alcohol. We are drafting a bill that will create thousands of new jobs, expunge marijuana possession convictions and create significant new financing for mental health, substance abuse and education.

A second bill, will end Iowa harsh criminal penalties and decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use. It will also expunge marijuana possession convictions for the same. Iowa needs to catch up. Twenty-six states already have decriminalized small amounts. Fifteen states already allow expungement of marijuana possession convictions. Iowa should do the same.

And a third bill, that would give local governments the authority to decriminalize a small amount of marijuana.

While a majority of Iowans now support regulating marijuana like alcohol, these bills are going nowhere without bipartisan support. In fact, Republicans are ONLY ones that can launch a new era of rational and just marijuana policy. We are hopeful that a bipartisan effort will develop to do just that.

Today, thirty-nine Iowa elected leaders for the first time have come together as one, to publicly and courageously call for marijuana reform. We warmly invite more of our state and local elected colleagues to join our efforts.

If you think marijuana prohibition has caused more harm than good, is a costly waste of your money, is a government infringement on your liberty, or think Iowa's unequal enforcement of marijuana laws is unjust, it's time to speak up for change.”

Statement by Senator-elect Sarah Trone Garriott, Windsor Heights

"Marijuana is safer than alcohol and should be regulated as such. Our out of date approach to Marijuana is harming our communities, wasting resources, and causing our state to miss big opportunities. I've heard from many constituents that it's time for a new conversation."

Statement by Representative Marti Anderson, Des Moines

"It is time for Iowa to legalize recreational use of marijuana for adults, to tax it, and to regulate its safety. Government prohibition of marijuana use by adults is a failed and destructive policy, much like prohibition was of alcohol. Massive amounts of taxpayer dollars have been spent on a long and damaging war on drugs. From 2010-2018, there 6.1 million marijuana-related arrests that ruined lives and futures with criminal records. Data shows those arrests disproportionately targeted black and brown Americans."

"Twenty-six states have decriminalized marijuana possession. Of those states, 16 have completely legalized marijuana possession in small amounts by adults. These states include Iowa's neighbor states of Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota. (All of our neighbors except Wisconsin.)"

Statement by Representative Sharon Steckman, Mason City

"Currently marijuana is untaxed, unregulated and criminal and has encouraged an underground, illegal market. Not only would the legalizing of marijuana make it safe and regulated, instead of a detriment, it would be an economic benefit to our state. I am looking forward to the discussion as this bill moves forward."

Statement by Representative Kristin Sunde, West Des Moines

"Constituents of all backgrounds and ages routinely ask me about marijuana legalization. One segment of the population that's especially interested in this, but often gets overlooked, is Iowans with chronic medical conditions who are eager to have the freedom to use marijuana for managing pain and other symptoms. Rather than driving across the border, or mailing it home from other states while on vacation, we should ensure Iowans have the freedom to purchase and use marijuana here, with thoughtful regulations in place. This would also offer Iowans currently using addictive opioids, another, arguably safer, option."