

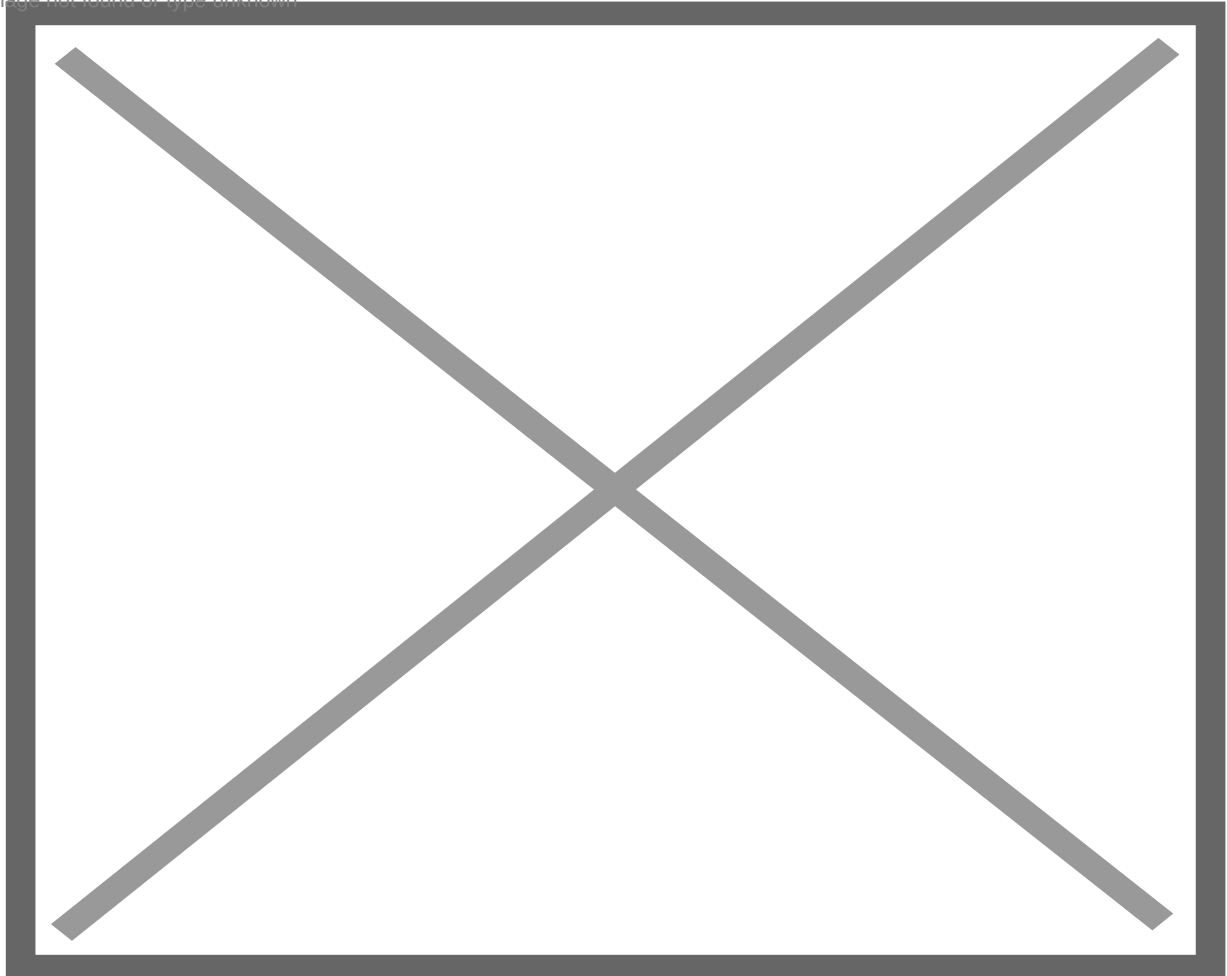
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# Biden Issues Executive Order Pardoning Thousands Convicted of Marijuana Possession Under Federal Law

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U.S President Joe Biden is calling on governors to support his position to pardon thousands of people convicted for simple possession of marijuana.

On Thursday, he issued an executive order encouraging those pardons – kick starting one of his many campaign promises. The move is expected to impact more than 6,000 people.

"As I've said before, no one should be in jail just for using or possessing marijuana ... Today, I'm taking steps to end our failed approach," he posted to the [POTUS Twitter page](#).

"There are thousands of people who were previously convicted of simple possession who may be denied employment, housing, or educational opportunities as a result. My pardon will remove this

burden," he stated.

He intends to pardon all prior federal offenses of simple possession in Washington and has directed the attorney general to issue certificates of pardons that individuals can show to law enforcement and employers. Mr. Biden also plans to instruct Xavier Becerra, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the attorney general to review the process of how marijuana is scheduled under federal law.

Marijuana is listed as a Schedule I controlled substance under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), and has been on Schedule I since the CSA was enacted in 1970. Schedule 1 drugs are noted as those that have a high potential for abuse, not currently accepted for medical use in treatment in the United States and lacks accepted safety for use under medical supervision. They include potent substances like heroine, morpheridine and Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

While the order does not speak to decriminalizing simple possession at a federal level, it has been seen as a step closer to achieving that goal with the support of 68% of Americans, according to a 2021 Gallup poll.

The action however remains a bone of contention for many Republicans. The poll stated that while most Democrats (83%) and political independents (71%) support legalization, Republicans are nearly evenly split on the question (50% in favor; 49% opposed).

Nonetheless, Mr. Biden views the move as an attempt to right laws that had selectively criminalized and disproportionately affected people of color who for decades have been more likely to be arrested, charged and convicted for the personal use of marijuana.

"Sending people to jail for possessing marijuana has upended too many lives - for conduct that is legal in many states. That's before you address the clear racial disparities around prosecution and conviction," the president wrote. "Today we begin to right those wrongs."

President Biden is however proposing to maintain legal limitations on trafficking, marketing and underage sales, recognizing that some limitations must remain to police its use.

While decriminalizing marijuana is illegal under federal law, 19 states and Washington, D.C. have legalized its use for recreation purposes by adults. Under federal law, someone convicted of simple marijuana use can spend up to one year in jail, be charged a minimum fine of \$1,000 or both for a first conviction.

In the U.S Virgin Islands, Governor Albert Bryan has been a strong proponent of such legislation, and has persistently called on local senators to introduce a bill that would allow for recreational use and that pardons people convicted for simple use of the drug.

Last month, he chastised senator Janelle Sarauw for not bringing the Virgin Islands Cannabis Use Act before the Legislature – an act he believes will improve the economic situation in the territory while eliminating some of the criminal offenses tied to possessing certain quantities of it. Through the Senate's preemption rule, once a senator has authorship of a bill, it cannot be brought before the Legislature without the preempting senator's consent, unless the rule is overridden by a majority of lawmakers. Senators tried this maneuver in Dec. 2020 but failed [following efforts by Senator Kurt Violet to stop it](#).

The use of marijuana for medical purposes was made legal in the USVI in January 2019, although its establishment has been moving slowly due to technical setbacks. But legislation to

decriminalize recreational use of marijuana is yet to be introduced on the Senate floor.

Two years ago, Mr. Bryan submitted a reworked version of the Adult Use Cannabis Act to the Legislature which would allow locals to participate in the cannabis industry and would provide restitution for people who have been incarcerated for marijuana use.

Meanwhile, on the mainland, shares of U.S.-listed marijuana growers and sellers have reportedly surged after President Biden announced the executive action.

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