



MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON
Councilmember, Eighth District

September 1, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

As public servants of the City of Los Angeles, we are committed to building a just, equitable, and thriving city. Together, with the residents we serve, we embark on a historic process to construct the framework of a new industry. Facilitating the nation's most lucrative commercial cannabis market which may dramatically reshape the landscape of our city.

Even as we stand on this precipice, we must recognize that we stand squarely in the shadow of the unjust War on Drugs. This atrocity targeted Angelinos of color, decimated neighborhoods, ripped families apart, and criminalized the illness of addiction. Today, we have an opportunity to build new systems and shape an industry in ways that recognizes wrongs, respect all residents, and intentionally builds a more equitable society.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

Beginning in 1971, President Nixon declared drugs as one the biggest existential threats to the United States. This declaration set us on a failed path to spend over one trillion dollars, arrest over 40 million people, and destroy countless families and neighborhoods, particularly in communities of color.¹ Experts agree, this War disproportionately targeted black and Latino families. Today, 80 percent of people federally incarcerated for drug offenses are black or Latino.²

Angelinos are not exempt from these racially-biased practices. Despite the reality that black young people use cannabis and lower rates than and white young people, black Angelinos are

¹ American Civil Liberties Union (2013). *The War on Marijuana in Black and White*. Retrieved from: https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/1114413-mj-report-rfs-rel1.pdf

² Drug Policy Alliance (2016) *The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race*. Retrieved from: http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA%20Fact%20Sheet_Drug%20War%20Mass%20Incarceration%20and%20Race_%28Feb.%202016%29_0.pdf

arrested for marijuana possession at seven times the rate of whites.³ This rate is higher than the cities of San Bernardino, Fresno, and Bakersfield.⁴

IMPLICATIONS

The consequences for drug-related convictions far and away surpass the gravity of the individual crimes. For decades, people convicted of simple possession faced a lifetime of barriers, many nearly impossible to overcome. The challenges posed to these populations include:

- Denial of business loans, professional licensing, employment, and financial aid make it impossible for individuals to progress **economically**.
- The **disenfranchisement** of people with felony convictions denies nearly 8 percent of black people of voting age the right to vote.⁵
- Mass incarceration led to nearly 3 million children to live in households where one or more parent is incarcerated, including one in nine black children and one in 28 Latino children compared to one in 57 white children.⁶ Additionally, up to 20% of children in the foster care system have an incarcerated parent.⁷

These are not minor inconveniences, there are the systematic dispossession of our fellow Americans rights, livelihood, families, and communities.

THE SHAME OF LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles leadership also enabled the infrastructure that facilitated and drove the underground economy. This includes the over-concentration of liquor stores, the disinvestment in infrastructure, unregulated vacant homes and structures, and policing strategies that alienated residents instead of collaborating with them. This benign neglect and government sanctioned aggression contributed to the all too violent neighborhoods, a thriving gang culture, and the over-concentration of negative land-uses. We can take responsibility for the actions of our predecessors, we can restore the trust of residents, and we can begin to right these wrongs.

³ CA NAACP & Drug Policy Alliance (2010), *Arresting Blacks for Marijuana in California*. Retrieved from: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/ArrestingBlacks.pdf>

⁴ CA NAACP & Drug Policy Alliance (2010), *Arresting Blacks for Marijuana in California*. Retrieved from: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/ArrestingBlacks.pdf>

⁵ Drug Policy Alliance (2016) *The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race*. Retrieved from: http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA%20Fact%20Sheet_Drug%20War%20Mass%20Incarceration%20and%20Race_%28Feb.%202016%29_0.pdf

⁶ Drug Policy Alliance (2016) *The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race*. Retrieved from: http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA%20Fact%20Sheet_Drug%20War%20Mass%20Incarceration%20and%20Race_%28Feb.%202016%29_0.pdf

⁷ Rutgers University (2014) *Children and Families of the Incarcerated Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from: <https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/nrccfi-fact-sheet-2014.pdf>

TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

In 1996, Californians legalized medical cannabis, kicking off two decades of conversations about the role of cannabis in the Golden State. In the succeeding years, Angelinos voted to expand and regulate cannabis. From Proposition D and Measure M at the city level and Proposition 64, Angelinos voted to create a safe, health-conscious, and community-driven cannabis industry.

Today, we are facilitating the creation of an industry that will allow people to make significant sums of money based on the exact same product that we arrested 40 million Americans, mostly Americans of color.⁸

THE OPPORTUNITY ON OUR DOORSTEP

Understanding the historic nature of the process we are undertaking, and taking into account our history, I believe that now is the time to create an equity-driven cannabis industry that protects neighborhood continuity. On August 18, 2017, I introduced 6 motions and resolutions to that end. I offer these motions based on rigorous analysis, shared values, and feedback from neighborhood council leaders, the faith community, substance abuse prevention activists, and an interactive telephone town hall with over 2,500 South Los Angeles residents.

1. Establish a **pilot program** for cannabis-related businesses within the City of Los Angeles to recruit and retain community members directly impacted by the War on drugs. This can include a social equity opportunities coordinator (SEOC), a small business incubator, quality community outreach, and facilitating innovative business models that support women and people of color, like cooperative ownership.
2. Create a **transparent and wide-reaching notification** process to ensure residents can weigh-in on location and operations of new cannabis business.
3. Create a **Neighborhood Health Fund** that offers small grants to programs that (1) improve resident life outcomes and (2) address the roots of prevention and healthy communities.
4. Create a **worker retention** program, modeled after the successful LAWA WRO, to protect workers when there is a change in ownership.
5. Advocate at the state level to combat end criminalization by eliminating all loopholes, including the **loophole that punishes 18-20 year-olds** for simple possession.

I will also introduce at least one additional motion to establish a Social Equity Program that includes tiered applications for licensing that prioritizes the residents most impacted by the legacy of the War on Drugs.

⁸ American Civil Liberties Union (2013). *The War on Marijuana in Black and White*. Retrieved from: https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/1114413-mj-report-rfs-rel1.pdf

I look forward to working with my colleagues to put into practice our shared values of equity and justice and using the power of the City to create a just cannabis industry.

Sincerely and With Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MH' followed by a flourish.

Marqueece Harris-Dawson
Councilmember, 8th District