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POLITICS

# First-Ever Congressional Bill To Decriminalize All Drugs Announce Of Nixon Drug War Anniversary



Published 1 week ago on June 15, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 



A first-ever bill to federally decriminalize possession of all currently illicit drugs—and incentivize states to follow suit—is being introduced in Congress.

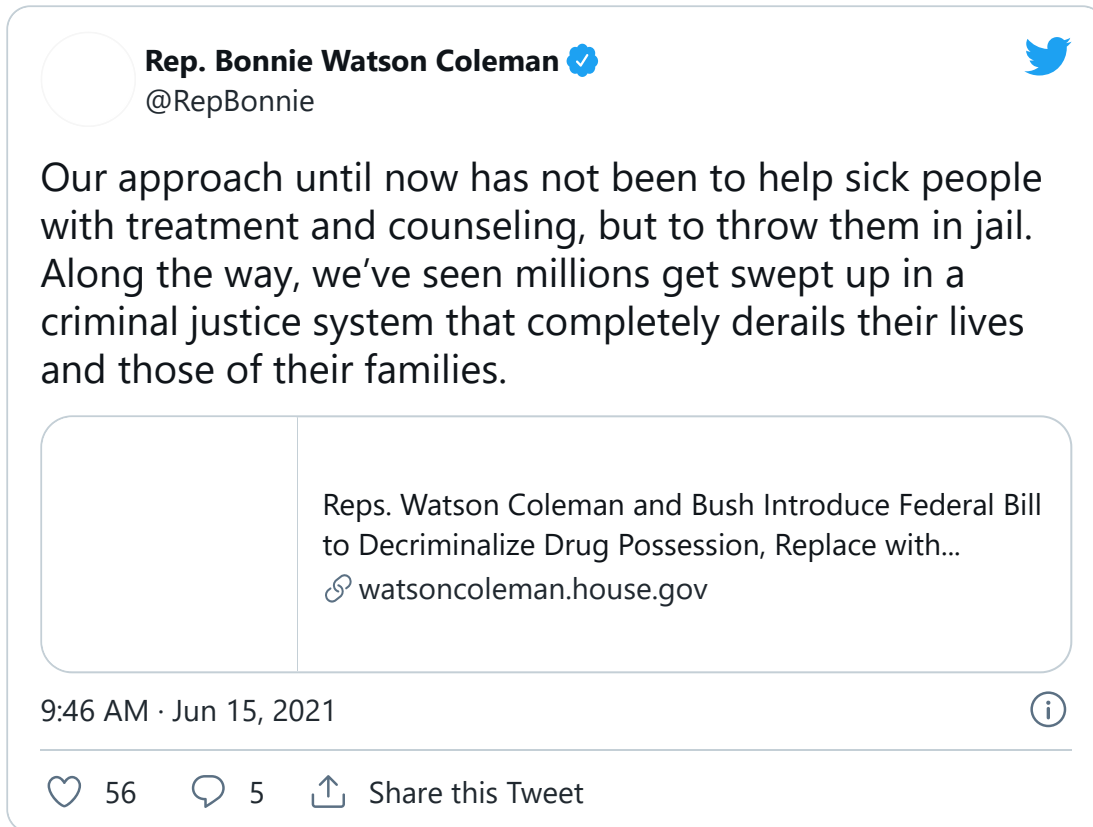


The measure, which will be filed later this week, is timed to coincide with the 50-year anniversary of President Richard Nixon's declaration of a war on drugs that has contributed to mass incarceration, disproportionately impacted communities of color and created countless consequences for countless Americans who have been criminalized for possessing certain psychoactive substances.

Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and Cori Bush (D-MO) are sponsoring the legislation which aims to promote a public health- and evidence-based approach to substance use. The bill is titled the Drug Policy Reform Act (DPRA) and was drafted in partnership with the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA).

The proposal would end the threat of incarceration for people caught possessing drugs for personal use. Courts would still have the option of imposing a fine, but that could be a person couldn't afford it.

Importantly, the measure would make it so the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—rather than the Justice Department—would be responsible for classifying drugs, with the intent being to shift that role to a health-centric model.



Federal district courts would be required to facilitate expungements and record sealing for those with qualifying convictions within one year of the bill's enactment.

Almost half of the federal prison population is currently serving time over drug-related offenses—a much smaller percentage of which is for possession alone—and so the direct impact of the legislation's decriminalization provision would be somewhat minimal on federal incarceration rates, especially when factoring in the size of state-level prison populations.

But that's where another key component comes into play: the bill would withhold federal funds for law enforcement through the Byrne and COPS grant program for states and municipalities that continue to enforce criminalization of simple drug possession. The threat of losing that money could be enough to incentivize states and municipalities to stop locking people up for drug possession.



DECRIMINALIZE DRUG POSSESSION.

Expunge drug records.

End the War on Drugs.

We need wrap-around care, not criminalization.

[@Bonnie4Congress](#) and I just introduced the bill to end the war on our people: the Drug Policy Reform Act.

12:43 PM · Jun 15, 2021



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Watson Coleman told Marijuana Moment on Tuesday that her office is “in the process finding a Senate sponsor for companion legislation and is planning to meet with House Judiciary Committee officials to discuss setting up a hearing for the bill.

“We’re really in the infancy stages here,” she said. “We recognize that we’re beyond the urgent, and so we’ll be doing our outreach and trying to garner the kind of support—on the Senate side, but even on the House side, working with the Progressive Caucus Black Caucus, the Hispanic Caucus and every other caucus to get as many members as to sign on.”



**Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman** [@RepBonnie](#) · Jun 15, 2021



Replying to [@RepBonnie](#)

From 2001 to 2010 over 7 million people were arrested simply for possession of marijuana. This has contributed to the United States - the land of the free - with the highest incarceration rate in the world. And none of this has made a dent in our use of drugs.



**Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman**

[@RepBonnie](#)

We need a new approach to drugs.

Our bill will not only decriminalize personal use and possession of drugs, but it will shift the focus of federal drug policy from the Department of Justice to the Department of Health and Human Services.

9:46 AM · Jun 15, 2021



39 4 Share this Tweet

In the meantime, advocates are cheering the fact that such a far-reaching bill was even introduced in Congress.

“Every 23 seconds, a person’s life is ruined for simply possessing drugs,” Queen Aedes policy manager for the Office of National Affairs at DPA, said in a press release. “Drug possession remains the most arrested offense in the United States despite the well-known fact that drug criminalization does nothing to help communities, it ruins them. It tears families apart, and causes trauma that can be felt for generations.”

The all-drug legislation may seem controversial given that Congress has consistently opted for more modest reform proposals such as simply protecting banks that service state-licensed marijuana businesses. But recent polling from DPA and the ACLU shows that [the public is ready for the policy change](#).

In fact, two-thirds of American voters believe that the war on drugs should end, and they support decriminalizing simple possession of currently illegal substances, the survey last week found.

Federal decriminalization and incentivizing reform at the state level are the main components of the new legislation. But it’s a multifaceted proposal that would fundamentally change the government’s decades-long approach to drugs. Here are some other key components:

- HHS would be required to create a commission within 180 days of the bill’s enactment to establish what the possession threshold should be for decriminalization, among other responsibilities
- The department would also have to publish a report on its determination, in addition to recommendations on how to prevent prosecutions for the low-level drug offenses, and share it with DOJ.
- Funds would be reinvested to support harm reduction and substance misuse treatment programs.
- Drug testing would not be allowed as a condition of receiving federal benefits.
- Drug convictions could not be used against people applying for or receiving federal housing assistance.

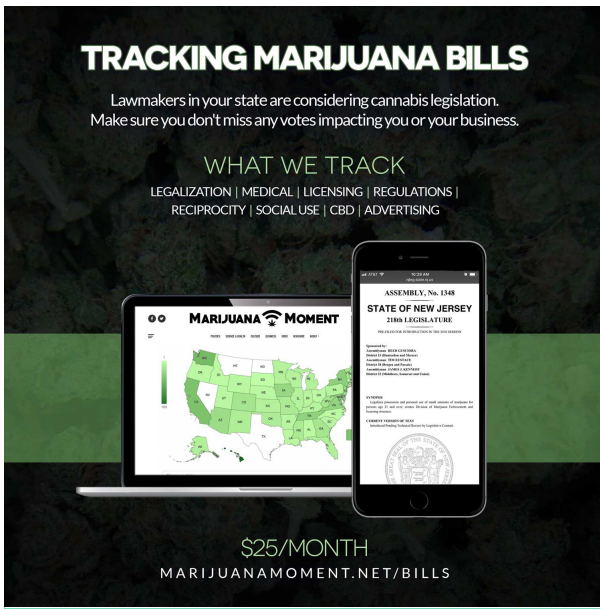
- It would be illegal to deny employment on the basis of criminal history involving drug possession.
- People could not be denied immigration status because of a drug offense.
- No one would lose the right to vote over drug possession or use, and there would be a process to restore voting rights for those who have lost them in the past.
- Civil asset forfeiture could not be used in cases where a person is suspected of “possessing a quantity of controlled substance solely for personal consumption.”
- The federal requirement to suspend driver’s licenses because of drug conviction would be repealed.
- There would be a requirement for federally funded drug education programs to be scientifically accurate, culturally competent and evidence-based.
- Data collection on drug enforcement would be improved.

“The United States has not simply failed in how we carried out the War on Drugs—the War on Drugs stands as a stain on our national conscience since its very inception,” Watson (D-CA), who is also the sponsor of a [congressional resolution to condemn the drug war](#), said.

“Begun in 1972 as a cynical political tactic of the Nixon Administration, the War on Drugs destroyed the lives of countless Americans and their families,” she said. “As we work on this issue, it is essential that we change tactics in how we address drug use away from a failed punitive approach and towards a health-based and evidence-based approach.”

—

**Marijuana Moment is already [tracking more than 1,100 cannabis, psychedelics drug policy bills](#) in state legislatures and Congress this year. [Patreon supporters](#) pledging at least \$25/month get access to our interactive maps, charts and hearing calendar so they don’t miss any developments.**



Learn more about our [marijuana bill tracker](#) and become a [supporter on Patreon](#) for access.

Bush, a freshman congresswoman, said the “punitive approach” of the drug war “creates pain, increases substance use, and leaves millions of people to live in shame and isolation with limited support and healing.”



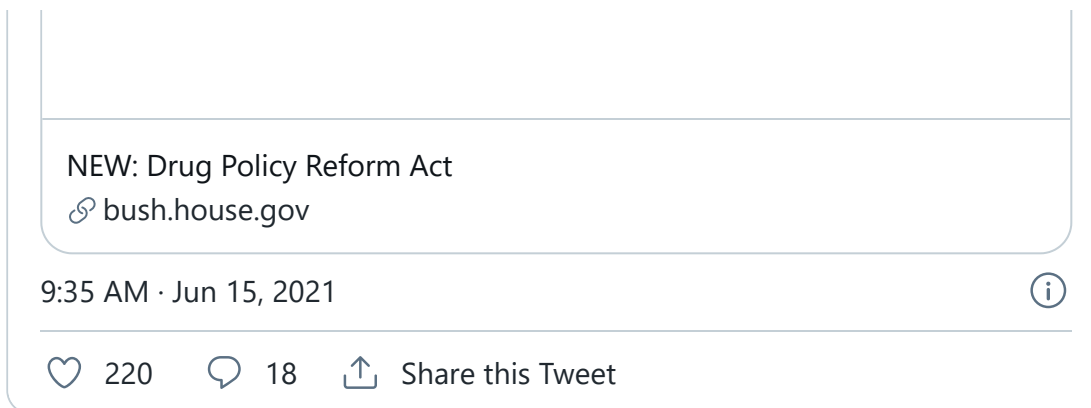
**Congresswoman Cori Bush** 

@RepCori



50 years. That’s how long our government has waged a war—not on drugs, but on people.

I’m proud to partner with [@RepBonnie](#) in introducing the Drug Policy Reform Act to end criminal penalties for drug possession at the federal level and repair harm in Black and brown communities.



Broad decriminalization might be new to Congress, but lawmakers in several states have recently been pushing for the reform.

Last month, a joint Maine House and Senate committee advanced a bill to broadly decriminalize possession of illicit drugs.

Last year, Oregon voters elected to end criminalization of low-level drug possession on ballot.

Vermont lawmakers also introduced a bill in March that would end criminal penalties for possessing small amounts of drugs in the state.

Also that month, a Rhode Island Senate committee held a hearing on decriminalization legislation to replace criminal penalties for possessing small amounts of drugs with a fine.

President Joe Biden has voiced support for ending incarceration for low-level drug cases saying “nobody should be going to jail for the use of drugs” and the country should “change the way we deal with all drug abuse.” But the administration has not taken any demonstrable steps to redirect federal policy so far, and he’s yet to grant presidential clemency for thousands of people incarcerated for drugs.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in April that Biden’s pledge to release federal inmates with marijuana convictions specifically would start with rescheduling cannabis. Her proposal that advocates say wouldn’t actually accomplish what she suggested.

Meanwhile, congressional lawmakers are also working to end a more specific federal prohibition on marijuana.



The Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act—which we deschedule cannabis and promote social equity, [cleared the chamber last year](#) and [we recently refiled](#).

Senate leadership is [continuing to draft a bill to end federal cannabis prohibition](#), which Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has repeatedly said would be introduced “sooner than later.” Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR), who is also working the bill alongside Schumer and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), [said to expect a filing “very soon.”](#)

**The full text of the drug decriminalization legislation is not yet available, but a summary is below:**

[DPRA summary](#) by [Marijuana Moment](#)

## Nebraska Marijuana Activists Plan 'Mass Scale' Medical Cannabis Campaign For 2022 Ballot

Nebraska marijuana activists are gearing up for a "mass scale" campaign to put medical cannabis legalization on the state's 2022 ballot after the legislature failed to pass a bill to enact the reform this session. And since the state Supreme Court invalidated a measure that qualified for the 2020 ballot based on a statutory challenge, ... Continue reading



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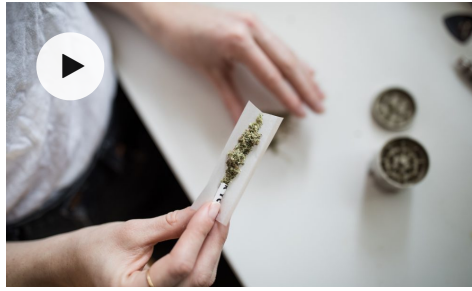


Kyle Jaeger



Kyle Jaeger is Marijuana Moment's Los Angeles-based associate editor. His work has also appeared in TIME, VICE and attn.

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**VA Continues To Oppose Research Bill For Military Under Biden**

*POLITICS*

# Rhode Island House Speaker Says Marijuana Legalization Can't Be Rushed After Senate Vote



Published 44 mins ago on June 24, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 



The Rhode Island Senate might have [passed a bill to legalize marijuana this week](#), but a top House lawmaker says his chamber needs more time to resolve differences between competing reform proposals.

In an interview with The Boston Globe that was published on Thursday, House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi (D) was asked whether Rhode Island can “afford to wait” on legalization in light of [cannabis-related developments in surrounding states like Connecticut](#) and Massachusetts.

“Yes, absolutely we can and we should [wait] because all of the proposals are very divergent,” he said, referring to the Senate bill, a separate House one and another measure filed by the

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# FDA Head Refuses To Say Whether Marijuana Is More Dangerous Than Tobacco



Published 1 hour ago on June 24, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 



The head of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Wednesday dodged a congressional question about whether marijuana is more harmful than tobacco.

During a hearing on youth vaping that was held by the House Oversight and Reform Economic and Consumer Policy Subcommittee, Rep. Andrew Clyde (R-GA) asked FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock plainly: “Would you agree that marijuana is a more dangerous product than tobacco?”

“I don’t know that a direct comparison has been made,” Woodcock replied. “I cannot say...

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# United Nations Urges Global Ban On Marijuana Advertising In Novel Regulator Recommendation



Published 4 hours ago on June 24, 2021

By **Kyle Jaeger** 

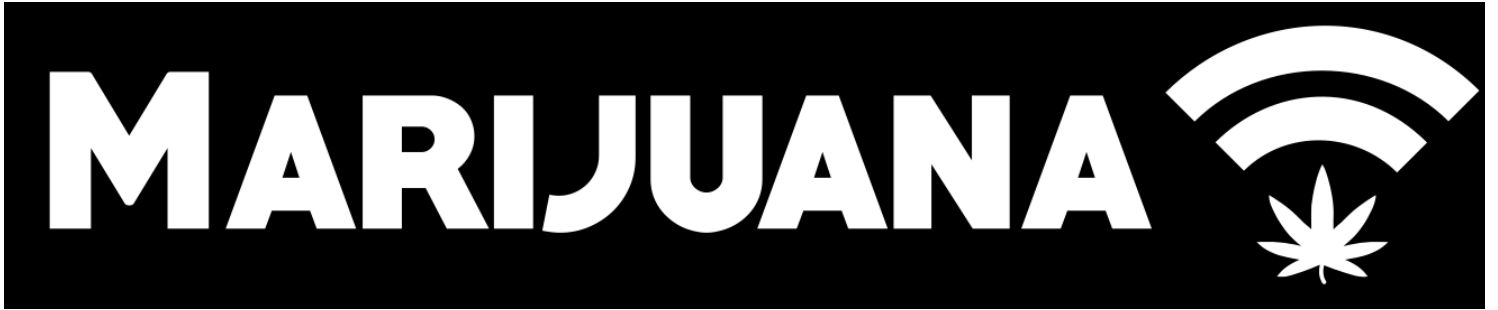


The United Nations (UN) drug division is urging a global ban on marijuana advertising—but some advocates see that as a sign the prohibitionist body is coming to terms with the fact widespread legalization is inevitable.

In its 2021 World Drug Report, released on Thursday, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said that perceptions of the risks of cannabis have decreased substantially among young people as more areas have loosened laws around the plant or legalized it in some form and as THC potency has increased.

But while industry stakeholders may not be inclined to embrace the body's advice on an

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