

## ▣ Disparities in marijuana enforcement widen Minnesota's equity gap for communities of color

Written by Nicole Simms, Ph.D., Minnesota 2020 Fellow  
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Blacks in Minnesota are 6.4 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites, one of the nation's highest disparities, according to FBI statistics. Minnesota 2020's latest report, *Collateral Costs*, finds these disproportionate arrest rates further exacerbate equity gaps for individuals and neighborhoods in communities of color.

The research set out to determine costs beyond fines and attorney fees to individuals arrested and/or convicted for marijuana possession, including lost economic opportunity, property forfeiture, and being removed from social safety net programs.

For example, drug-related activity can result in a three to five year eviction from public housing. A Hennepin County family forced to move from public to private housing will end up paying at least \$14,300 over three years and at least \$23,900 over five years for private housing. A marijuana possession arrest will also potentially impact access to federal student loans and immigration status.

Even a low-level marijuana conviction can cost someone up to \$76,000 over a decade using fairly conservative estimates. As a result, Minnesota 2020 is joining a growing body of legal experts and community activists in calling for marijuana law reform. The report's recommendations range from fairer seizure laws and more accountable enforcement strategy to full legalization.

We must put all the options on the table if we're going to have an honest discussion about this

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issue. Most deterrents to marijuana use have been ineffective and have disproportionately harmed communities of color.

A variety of factors contribute to the disparities in arrest rates. Over-policing in communities of color, cultural differences in where and how marijuana is used and purchased, and grants and seizure policies that incentivize volume over quality in drug arrests are major factors for the disparity.

As a result, blacks in Ramsey County are 8.8 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites, the state's highest disparity for 2011. Hennepin and Steele counties follow, with blacks in both places 6.4 time more likely to be arrested.

When state and federal policies strip wealth out of communities, it's time to reexamine our approach to social, economic, and criminal justice issues. By highlighting the collateral costs individuals and communities suffer from marijuana enforcement disparities, we hope to reframe the debate about marijuana reform.

*MN 2020 is a nonpartisan, progressive think tank that focuses on the issues that really matter: education, health care, transportation and economic development. New content and analysis can be found daily at [www.MN2020.org](http://www.MN2020.org).*

(Link to report: <http://bit.ly/1jwpyg> )