



Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: SB 420, Relating to expungement of marijuana related convictions

April 5, 2019

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 420, which would create a process to ease the expungement of marijuana-related convictions which would no longer be a crime under current law. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color.

We are an alliance of culturally-specific community based organizations with representation from the following communities of color: African, African American, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Slavic. Our mission is to address the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism and inequity of services experienced by our families, children, and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.

Addressing the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on communities of color is a major priority of our coalition. Contact with the justice system has significant repercussions for individuals, resulting in significant barriers to employment, stable housing, and loans. These barriers harm not only the individual but also their families and communities. Expunging minor marijuana-related convictions of acts that no longer constitute crimes is a matter of basic fairness, particularly in light of the targeting of communities of color under marijuana probationary law that resulted in disproportionate rates of arrests and convictions of individuals of color.

We believe that the value underlying the misdemeanor marijuana conviction expungement process is justice, and to have a truly fair system, impacted individuals must be able to actually take advantage of it. Many of the same individuals who were convicted under these laws lack access to the legal assistance or funds that are needed to go through the complicated and costly process of expungement. By reducing the burden, more individuals would be able to support their families with income and stable housing, and improve their overall wellbeing.

On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I respectfully urge you to vote yes on SB 420 so to mitigate the disproportionate impact of convictions for minor marijuana-related crimes so that more Oregonians of color can achieve stability and prosperity.

Thank you,
Jenny Lee, Advocacy Director
Coalition of Communities of Color

