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October 30, 2019

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Decriminalization Key Factor in Stemming Tide of Mass Incarceration

Representative David Crowley (D-Milwaukee) made the following statement regarding the introduction of legislation to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana:

“I am proud to be co-authoring this important legislation to decriminalize possession of 28 grams – 1 ounce – or less of marijuana. The weaponization of drug possession laws, particularly marijuana, has been the driver of the state of ramped mass incarceration in which we find ourselves. While black men, women and children are just 6% of the population, we make up nearly **40%** of the prison population. This disparity is a direct result of the unequal enforcement of our marijuana laws: in Milwaukee County, 86% of all felony marijuana charges are levied against African-Americans – despite making up only 25% of the county’s population.

“Of the black men who are arrested in Milwaukee County, nearly 40% are arrested because of drug charges. In Dane County, a black man or woman is nearly 100 times more likely to be arrested for a drug crime than their white counterparts. While studies show that usage rates are roughly the same across race; enforcement is being weaponized against men and women of color to continue the scourge of mass incarceration.

“This bill should have been passed years ago – Wisconsin is now an island of antiquated drug policy in a sea of decriminalization. It is absolutely wrong to continue this needless cycle of disparate enforcement that continues to feed mass incarceration – I have seen firsthand the devastating effect of our unjust and racially inequitable criminal justice system. We have lost a generation of men and women to the failed war on drugs and mass incarceration – how many more must be lost before we have the courage to do something about it?”

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