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Testimony: HF 600

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Chair Jamie Becker-Finn and House Representatives,

My name is Munira Mohamed and I'm the Policy Associate for the ACLU MN. I'm here to speak today in support of House File 600 regarding cannabis legalization. I'm sure none of you are strangers to this topic and have heard it before, so I'll be brief.

Cannabis laws desperately need reform due to the stark racial disparities in marijuana possession arrests and the fact that they haven't gotten better in Minnesota or nationwide. Nationally, on average, a Black person is 3.6 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person, even though Black and white people use marijuana at similar rates. Here in Minnesota a black person is 5.4 times more likely -- 5.4 times! -- to be arrested than a white person, which is significantly higher than the national average.

The disproportionate targeting and over-policing of black communities for a substance that is equally used among the population is the natural consequence of marijuana criminalization and the by-product of the failed war on drugs. It goes without saying that the personal cost to those arrested can ruin lives. Being caught with even the smallest amounts of marijuana can risk your housing status, employment opportunities, child custody determinations, immigration status and eligibility for financial aid.

House File 600 is a viable path toward legalizing marijuana use and possession for Minnesota adults. It has strong provisions that don't simply replace marijuana prohibition with a system of

onerous fines and fees, which can drive families into debt and economic instability. It also provides clemency or resentencing for certain marijuana convictions that people have been incarcerated for and the expungement of past marijuana convictions.

We sincerely hope that the Legislature takes quick and serious action on moving this issue forward. If full legalization does not occur, we will see further arrests for possession, ever increasing prison population and the criminalization of Black and Brown communities.

ACLU-MN urges you to support HF 600.

Thank you

