



Marijuana Policy Project's Support for HB 1596

Re: Testimony in support for HB 1596

February 14, /2025

Dear Chair Klemin, Vice Chair Karls, and distinguished members of the committee:

My name is Bridget Spiddle, and I work for the State Policies department at the Marijuana Policy Project. We support HB 1596 as an important move for fairness, justice, and proportionality and hope that you will please advance it out of committee.

Reducing penalties for possessing a half-ounce of marijuana from up to \$1,000, to up to \$150 will greatly ease the financial burden on North Dakotans. A 2025 Bankrate study [found](#) that 59% of Americans cannot afford an unexpected \$1,000 emergency expense. This level of a fine can have devastating consequences, even causing a person to lose their home. \$150 is still a very significant penalty, and is higher than North Dakota's fine for driving 50 miles above the speed limit.

Also, the changing of infractions from criminal to non-criminal is a commendable step in a positive direction. Criminal records have life-altering effects. Possession of small amounts of cannabis should not be a sentence that follows individuals for the rest of their lives.

With over 50% of the United States population residing in legalized states, it is fair to give North Dakotans the opportunity to at least not have their lives derailed for small amounts of cannabis. Lowering the infraction from criminal to a non-criminal citation allows individuals to still keep their jobs — and obtain new jobs — and to be able to continue their lives as contributing members of society.

Another positive aspect of this bill is it expands record sealing opportunities for first time possession offenses. The individual must have had no other infractions in the two years following the incident. This change gives folks the opportunity to redeem themselves if they have a clean record in two years. A criminal record seeps into every aspect of one's life (applying for jobs, apartments, loans, etc). Expanding eligibility for sealing ultimately benefits North Dakota's economy as a whole, and allows folks a well deserved chance at a fresh start to support their families.

Please support HB 1595 to have a more reasonable and proportionate penalty for cannabis possession, and to avoid ruining lives for conduct half of Americans have engaged in.

Sincerely,

Bridget Spidelle