

The facts are in, Wisconsin is ready to legalize cannabis

By: Senator Melissa Agard

For far too long, opponents of legal cannabis have peddled falsehoods as a way to scare people. This misinformation debuted in 1936 with “Reefer Madness”, an anti-marijuana propaganda film that fueled drug hysteria. Because of this, Wisconsin has lost out on millions of tax dollars from the blooming cannabis industry.

The most dangerous thing about cannabis in Wisconsin is that it is illegal. However, my colleagues across the aisle will tell a different story to legitimize their ill-informed opinions on cannabis. There are myths and outright falsehoods circulating about marijuana - so it's time to set the record straight. Here are just a few well-sourced facts everyone should know about cannabis and legalization.

FACT: Cannabis Legalization DOES NOT Make Communities Unsafe

Opponents of legalization claim that crime will increase with legalization. However, several studies have shown that there is little to no change in crime rates after legalization. [Most often, violent crime has been trending with the national average with states that have legalized cannabis, with some states seeing small up or down ticks.](#) Overall, violent crime has neither soared nor plummeted in the wake of marijuana legalization.

Another concern opponents cite is the increase in impaired driving with cannabis legalization. In states with legal cannabis, there have been [no noticeable increases](#) to [impaired driving incidents](#). I am against impaired driving of any kind - drunk driving, texting while driving, etc. As a state we must do more to prevent impaired driving on all fronts. However, legal cannabis has been shown to not increase crashes across [several studies](#).

Finally, legal cannabis provides consumers with a safe, regulated product rather than a product from an underground market. Legal cannabis provides a safer alternative.

FACT: Arrests Relating to Cannabis are Not Evenly Distributed Across Demographics

Cannabis prohibition and laws surrounding cannabis have long been rooted in racism. The [Marihuana Tax Act of 1937](#) essentially banned marijuana due to stereotypes about the plant. [Since then, people of color have been disproportionately arrested and imprisoned for marijuana use. It makes sense that a policy rooted in racism still has racist effects today.](#)

Punishments for possession of marijuana increased as people of color were targeted more and more. In Wisconsin, Black people are [more than 4 times as likely](#) than white people to be arrested for possession of marijuana. Black people are also more than 4 times as likely than white people to be convicted.

FACT: Teen Usage DOES NOT Increase with Legalization

Common points against legalization claim that legal cannabis will cause an increase in youth who will use drugs. However, [studies](#) have found in states that have legalized cannabis, there have been [no increases in teen usage](#). A study done by [JAMA](#) shows that youth usage has had

a slight down tick, while several other [studies](#) have shown little to no changes in youth usage rates.

This bill takes this into consideration and adds cannabis safety to the health class curriculum. This would provide students the opportunity to learn about the substance and be able to make informed decisions once they are legally able to purchase.

FACT: Wisconsinites Support Legal Cannabis

Cannabis legalization is a popular policy issue. A [Marquette University Law School poll](#) in 2019 found that 59% of Wisconsinites supported fully legalized cannabis. In fact, Wisconsinites support a legal cannabis market.

Even nationally, legalization is a popular issue. Recently, a [Pew Research poll](#) showed that less than 10% of Americans still believe that cannabis should be illegal - with the other +90% supporting legal cannabis in some capacity. Tides are changing and it is time that Wisconsin changes too.

To be blunt, it is past time Wisconsin legalizes cannabis and taxes it like we already do alcohol. We are losing business to our neighboring states who have already seen the light and legalized. We must begin to put our state on a path towards economic prosperity and building a 21st century farming industry. We must begin to right the wrongs of our state's egregious racial disparities. We can do this together, folks.

Our farmers are ready. Our communities long-wronged by out-dated drug policies are ready. Our Main Streets are ready. Our economic future is waiting. Wisconsin is ready to grow our future. Let's legalize cannabis.