



## **The Gateway to Equity, Opportunity, and Moving Wisconsin Forward**

*Why empty promises of limited cannabis legalization are not enough*

Representative Melissa Sargent

The simple truth is that the legalization of cannabis will bring multifaceted benefits— from economic opportunity, to medicinal relief and addressing egregious racial disparities— for our state. Yet, time and time again, lawmakers here in the Capitol continue to fail to grasp, or choose to dismiss, the importance of truly comprehensive cannabis reform.

Marijuana legalization offers boundless positive impacts for Wisconsin that we as a state have still not been able to fully appreciate. While many outdated and ill-informed prohibitionists call marijuana a gateway drug, they might not be that far off— the reality is that the full cannabis legalization *is* a gateway. A gateway to equity, opportunity, and moving Wisconsin forward.

### **A gateway to equity**

Far too many lives and communities have been hurt by out of date and backwards cannabis policies, and we must take steps towards rectifying these damages. Here in Wisconsin, a black individual is charged at 6x the rate of their white counterparts for marijuana related crimes, while usage rates are largely the same in our state regardless of race.

Legalization efforts that exclude criminal justice reform, including decriminalization and expungement components, and fail to lift up the minority populations that harsh marijuana sentencing has too often inequitably targeted, are not enough. Full legalization provides the ability to address these massive and egregious racial disparities— it is crucial that cannabis reform in our state be used as a vehicle to make movement in rectifying these injustices, and to put an end to criminalizing everyday Americans.

### **A gateway to opportunity**

Further, full legalization would provide endless economic opportunity for our state. From tax revenue and insurmountable economic stimulus, to job creation and vital tourism benefits, Wisconsin has the chance to be a hub for cannabis innovation and economic prosperity, while reviving our state's strong history of farming heritage.

We have seen in state after state the vast opportunities that legalization has brought for business owners, farmers, and workers alike. With 34 states around the country— including 11 states that have fully legalized— hundreds-of-thousands of people are reaping the benefits of cannabis reform, yet Wisconsin continues to lag behind, missing out on thousands of family-sustaining jobs and billions of dollars being created and invested back into our state.

The full legalization of cannabis provides a truly home grown economic solution. Failing to include the legalization of recreational use in cannabis reform measures here in Wisconsin is also a failure to take advantage of these lucrative and life changing opportunities— opportunities that are too great to ignore.



**A gateway to moving Wisconsin forward**

The reality is, the most dangerous thing about marijuana is that it is illegal. Cannabis legalization addresses the reality that, at the end of the day, people are using marijuana in our communities. By facing this head on and embracing legalization, we can bring Wisconsin into the 21st century and in turn actually make our state a safer place.

It is high time that Wisconsin reevaluate its outdated and dangerous prohibition of cannabis and join the states across our nation who have moved forward towards prosperity. I know that we as a state cannot afford to kick the can down the road any longer, or to continue to allow lawmakers to dismiss the untold positive impacts that legalization will have on our state.

We need to think beyond the empty promises of limited legalization offered by Wisconsin's Republican leadership, and fully embrace cannabis reform in order to comprehensively change the lives of countless Wisconsinites.

The people have spoken. It is time to open the gateway to equity, opportunity, and moving Wisconsin forward.