

NORTH PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Minute on the War on Drugs

As an expression of our belief in nonviolence and the value of each person, Friends have throughout our history sought compassionate and effective answers to social problems.

One of the most problematic federal policies for decades has been the federal government's failed War on Drugs campaign. Its stated purpose has been to reduce the production, sale, and use of targeted drugs, the abuse of which can be devastating to individuals, families, workplaces, and communities. Yet, criminalization has failed to reduce drug abuse, has created a major illegal drug and secondary crime network, and has filled our prisons and courtrooms with individuals charged with drug-related crimes, whose drug use would be reduced more effectively with a public health model instead of a criminalization model.

We call for the implementation of a public health model as a sustainable and humane way to achieve the goal of reducing drug abuse in the United States. Such a model could utilize a tightly regulated distribution system for listed drugs. In such a system, drugs could be made available at reasonable prices in order to eliminate or reduce property and personal crime by those paying inflated prices from unlawful dealers. Access to drugs could be conditioned on drug counseling and treatment where abuse is indicated. Failure to comply with drug regulations could result in civil proceedings, including civil contempt for willful failure to comply with appropriate orders. With a portion of the resources resulting from reduced prison construction and operation cost, a major public education campaign could be undertaken regarding drug abuse similar to the campaign against tobacco use, along with enhanced treatment and prevention programs, which are now seriously under-funded.

We also call for decriminalization of drug use and possession, though not production or sale, in order to end the injustice, the violence to property and persons, including those who are dually affected by mental illness and drug use, and the ineffective use of resources that are such a large part of our current system of drug control.

We ask Friends in NPYM to reflect on the deep social costs of the "War on Drugs" policy and to join with others, including the Pacific Northwest office of the American Friends Service Committee, in promoting just and compassionate ways for our communities, states, and nation to address the important issue of drug abuse. We also ask that this minute be sent to all Yearly Meetings in the United States, to encourage Friends throughout the country to consider and act on this issue, and that copies of the minute be sent to all of our state and federal legislators.

Approved July, 2008

Minute on the War on Drugs Background Information and Resources

(1) According to the Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative:

1.5 million people are arrested every year for drug-law violations—75% for possession, not sale or manufacture. 600,000 of these arrests are for possessing marijuana for personal use.

African-Americans comprise nearly 60% of the people in state prisons for drug felonies. Due largely to the War on Drugs, one in three Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 is in prison, on probation, or on parole—even though their drug usage rates are the same as those of other Americans. 14% of Black men have lost their right to vote due to felony convictions.

A majority of women in federal prisons are there for drug law violation; 70% are first-time offenders. Many are incarcerated on “conspiracy” charges, such as taking phone messages for a live-in boyfriend who sells drugs. More than 75% of female prisoners are mothers of small children.

Nearly 40% of the AIDS cases reported in the United States have been linked to illicit drug injection. The US Department of Health and Human Services has determined that needle-exchange programs reduce the spread of HIV without increasing drug use, yet the federal government refuses to fund these programs.

Civil liberties violations and invasion of privacy are a routine part of drug-law enforcement. These include drug dogs, urine tests, phone taps, paid confidential informants, entrapment, curbside garbage searches, military helicopters, infrared heat detectors, no-knock warrants, and stop-and-frisk searches of minorities and young people. Property forfeiture laws allow police to take property without a criminal conviction.

Mandatory minimum prison sentences have removed judicial discretion over sentencing, resulting in excessive sentences for even first-time nonviolent drug offenders.

The Drug Free Student Provision of the federal Higher Education Act, which makes students ineligible for financial aid if they have been convicted of a drug offense, effectively prevents many students from attending school and often forces those affected while in school to leave for lack of funding.

Federal categorizing of marijuana as a Schedule I substance with no known medical value has deprived many seriously-ill people of its use as an effective therapy for some medical conditions, subjecting them to arrest, fines, and imprisonment even where state law allows medical use of marijuana or when it is prescribed or recommended by their physician.

Tens of millions of Americans—including children and adolescents—still use or abuse illegal drugs. The War on Drugs has failed to accomplish its stated goal of a “drug-free America.”

(2) Under a public health model:

There could be a tightly regulated distribution system for listed drugs. In such a system, drugs could be made available at reasonable prices in order to eliminate or reduce property and personal crime by those seeking to pay inflated prices from unlawful dealers. Access to drugs could be conditioned on drug counseling and treatment where abuse is indicated. Failure to comply with drug regulations could result in civil proceedings, including civil contempt for willful failure to comply with appropriate orders. With a portion of the resources resulting from reduced prison construction and operation cost, a major public education campaign could be undertaken regarding drug abuse similar to the campaign against tobacco use, along with enhanced treatment and prevention programs, which are now seriously under-funded.

The excellent King County Bar Association Drug Policy Project Report, below, discusses the public health approach to reducing drug abuse.

(3) Resources for more information:

King County Bar Association Drug Policy Project Report

www.kcba.org/ScriptContent/KCBA/druglaw/pdf/EffectiveDrugControl.pdf

Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative www.idpi.us

Drug Policy Alliance www.drugpolicy.org

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition www.leap.cc