

LAST PRISONER PROJECT

January 10, 2022

The Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor of New Jersey
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

While many are currently poised to mint millions of dollars operating state-regulated cannabis businesses, others (disproportionately Black and brown people) continue to suffer the collateral consequences of New Jersey's unjust and inequitable approach to the criminalization of marijuana. Hundreds remain incarcerated or on supervised release in New Jersey as a result of a cannabis conviction.

While New Jersey has taken steps to redress this disparity with provisions that allow for automatic expungement and limited resentencing, current efforts should be accelerated so that the cases of those who remain imprisoned for a cannabis-related crime in New Jersey are addressed before others begin to profit. This is why we are calling on you to grant categorical clemency to all individuals incarcerated in New Jersey prisons for cannabis-related offenses.

With more than two million individuals behind bars, the United States leads the world in incarceration. The majority of those imprisoned are held in state facilities. Mass incarceration has devastated families and communities, caused untold human suffering and economic loss, and placed enormous burdens on limited state resources. Our criminal legal system's obsession with lengthy terms of imprisonment denigrates the fundamental notion of human redemption. When we consider the lost opportunities and economic impact of this national project, the net result is incalculable.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic—which has had a devastating impact on incarcerated populations and those responsible for their supervision and care—underscores the urgent need to intelligently and safely reduce prison populations.

For those whose lengthy incarceration is driven by cannabis-related offenses, the injustice is particularly striking. In 2010, the New Jersey legislature legalized cannabis for medicinal use. A decade later, adult use of marijuana was overwhelmingly approved by voters.

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The state of New Jersey is projected to bring in up to \$173.5 million a year in tax revenue from the sale of legal cannabis. While the cannabis industry is on the cusp of becoming a booming business in New Jersey, hundreds still languish in state prison or continue to suffer the collateral consequences of a cannabis-related offense in the state.

One such individual is Humberto Ramirez. Just days after New Jersey residents voted to legalize adult-use cannabis, Humberto Ramirez was sentenced to 7 years in state prison for transporting 6 pounds of marijuana. Humberto, a loving husband, and devoted father, now sits behind bars at great cost to New Jersey taxpayers. His family's lives were shattered the day he was convicted. He has been unable to see his family during his incarceration due to the ongoing pandemic and has been unable to access adequate medical care.

The time is right to seek redress for Humberto and anyone impacted by these unjust laws, to enable them to reenter society and to restore rights that have been denied as a result of cannabis convictions.

If you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter, please contact Sarah Gersten, Executive Director and General Counsel for the Last Prisoner Project at sarah@lastprisonerproject.org

Respectfully Submitted,

Cannabis Voter Project
Coalition for Medical Marijuana NJ
Doctors for Cannabis Regulation
Last Prisoner Project
Latino Action Network
New Jersey Cannabis Trade Association (NJCTA)
New Jersey Harm Reduction Coalition
New Jersey Chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
New Jersey NAACP
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Jersey United for Marijuana Reform (NJUMR)
Redman
Salvation and Social Justice
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Weedmaps