



**For Immediate Release**  
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**LDF Applauds President Biden’s Decision to Pardon All Prior Federal Offenses for  
Minor Cannabis Possession and Related Reforms**

Today, President Biden announced major steps in reforming the nation’s long-standing criminalization of people – disproportionately Black and Brown persons – for possessing or using cannabis, including pardons for prior federal offenses related to cannabis possession. In response, [Legal Defense Fund](https://www.lawforpeople.org/) (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson issued the following statement:

“We strongly applaud President Biden for keeping his campaign promise to ensure that no one is in federal prison for using or possessing cannabis. Black and Latino Americans have long been disproportionately punished because of our country’s misguided War on Drugs, which has destroyed communities, families, and individuals. Despite using at a lower rate than white Americans, Black people have been four times more likely to be arrested for cannabis. In 2018, 89% of those who were federally sentenced on cannabis charges were people of color. All the while, the legal cannabis industry – run overwhelmingly by white men – is projected to make more than \$45 billion in 2024.

“President Biden’s announcement today that he is issuing full and unconditional pardons of all prior federal offenses for simple possession of cannabis by citizens and lawful permanent residents is critical for many Black Americans who have been imprisoned - some for mandatory life sentences - under draconian drug policies and gives them a chance at freedom. This laudable exercise of executive power is an important step in remediating the consequences of our punitive and failed drug policy.

“It is critical that governors across the country follow the President’s lead and fully expunge all cannabis-related convictions and affirmatively restore any and all civil rights that have been forfeited as a result of such convictions. We also call on state and federal officials to develop and invest in more comprehensive solutions to harmful forms of drug use, including treatment and recovery programs, and to treat harmful drug use as a public health concern rather than criminalize it. The decades-long effort to embed racism and disinformation into drug policy cannot be easily reversed, but today’s action by President Biden is a powerful example of sound, compassionate, and corrective leadership that should be mirrored at every level of government.”

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*Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the*

*Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.*