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Jersey City to Become First in State to Announce New Marijuana Decriminalization Policy

Mayor Fulop and Chief Prosecutor Jake Hudnut Announce Changes to Prosecution; Jersey City Joins Growing List of Progressive Cities Across Nation Decriminalizing Marijuana Possession

JERSEY CITY – Today, **Mayor Steven Fulop** and **Chief Prosecutor Jake Hudnut** announce Jersey City’s new marijuana decriminalization policy, in an effort to combat the widespread inequality and costly prosecution of marijuana cases. The new policy, which will go into effect on Thursday, July 19th, directs all Jersey City prosecutors to cease prosecuting marijuana possession cases before the municipal courts. Jersey City will be the first in New Jersey to put forward a policy to address decriminalization on a local level, in the hopes of guiding other towns across the state to enact similar changes to outdated marijuana policies.

“The fact is, marijuana arrests and prosecutions in New Jersey, and around the nation, point to severe inequalities that negatively impact people of color disproportionately, and lead to long-term economic challenges for anyone who finds themselves prosecuted for possession,” said Mayor Fulop. “We are working to correct this with our new policy in a proactive way, and I am proud that we will be the first in the state to do so.”

The new policy, written by Chief Prosecutor Jake Hudnut, relies on the ability of municipal prosecutors to exercise discretion as it relates to future marijuana possession cases. As the policy directs, an individual who is arrested on a marijuana possession charge that meets certain criteria, such as no prior convictions, will now have their case dismissed outright. The goal is to avoid giving criminal records to these types of individuals who have been negatively impacted by marijuana-related charges in the past, and have been met with harsh consequences such as driver’s license suspensions, criminal records, loss of student financial aid, bans from public housing, adverse effects on employment opportunities, and loss of immigration status.

“In a City as large, diverse, and progressive as Jersey City, we are poised to take action and address this injustice,” said Chief Prosecutor Jake Hudnut. “We will not contribute to the racially disparate and costly prosecution of a nonviolent offense that is on the verge of legalization amid widespread public support. We have seen similar policies enacted with success across the country, and I am confident in our ability to join this conversation in a productive and positive way.”

The new policy amends all marijuana-related offenses to Local Ordinance offenses, which have no impact on an individual’s criminal record.

In addition to the racial inequalities and potentially life-altering consequences that stem from marijuana prosecution, there is a significant cost burden on local municipalities who are the entities that oversee these charges. Each year in the State of New Jersey there are more than 25,000 arrests for marijuana possession, and it is estimated that prosecution following these arrests has cost the state well more than \$1 billion each decade in policing, court operations, probation, and jailing. This new policy is built on the widespread believe that marijuana possession is non-violent in nature, and focusing law enforcement resources on violent offenses does far more to promote safe communities.

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