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Dallas City Council Members Propose Marijuana Decriminalization through City Charter Amendment

Dallas – Council Member Chad West, along with the support of several colleagues, will propose a City Charter amendment at the June 26, 2024 Council Meeting to decriminalize low levels of marijuana in the City of Dallas. The Council Members’ proposal mirrors the Dallas Freedom Act petition currently in circulation with over 50,000 signatures, which would direct the Dallas Police Department (DPD) to stop issuing citations or making arrests for Class A or Class B misdemeanor marijuana possession. Several other cities across the state have already decriminalized marijuana with over 70% voter approval, including Austin, Denton, Killeen, and San Marcos.

“Voters in our city and across the country want to decriminalize marijuana,” said Council Member Chad West. “Our already burdened police should focus their attention on serious crime, not arresting people with small amounts of marijuana. Bringing this to voters through a City Council-proposed Charter amendment instead of a petition will save the city time and resources.”

In 2021, at the request of Council Member Adam Bazaldua, the City Council Public Safety Committee received a briefing on the data surrounding marijuana charges, which highlighted enforcement disparities in communities of color. Members of the committee expressed concern and a desire to reduce inequitable enforcement across the city.

“For the past four years I have advocated for our council to implement this kind of initiative,” said Council Member Adam Bazaldua. “Our jails are overfilled with predominately brown and black males serving sentences for a substance that is making others millions of dollars in more than 30 states across the country. It’s past time we take action against this injustice.”

Council Member Jaime Resendez stated, "Despite the positive steps taken by the city and DPD in recent years, marijuana-related arrests continue, and racial disparities persist. Although marijuana use is comparable across racial lines, Black and Latino individuals are disproportionately arrested and punished. Decriminalization is the best way to address this disparity."

"For too long, the criminalization of marijuana has disproportionately affected marginalized communities, leading to unnecessary arrests, criminal records, and a cycle of disadvantage that hinders economic and social progress," added Council Member Zarin Gracey. "Decriminalizing marijuana is not just about changing laws; it's about rectifying decades of injustice and ensuring that our legal system is fair and equitable for all."

"The efforts of many of us on council to decriminalize marijuana over the years have had marginal success, at best, despite the overwhelming support for such policies among Dallasites," said former Councilmember Philip Kingston. "Amending the Charter will provide clear and unmistakable instruction, enforceable by law, to city officials to avoid the pointless harm caused by treating marijuana users as criminals."

Catina Voellinger, Executive Director of Ground Game Texas added, "This campaign embodies the demands of a broader movement for justice and local democracy, and has only been possible because of the local community, partners, and campaign workers, who braved unforgiving Texas elements and the hard relational labor of communicating our vision of dignity to tens of thousands of people. Together we've collected 50,000 signatures for the Dallas Freedom Act, a charter amendment that will reform marijuana enforcement, redress historic discrimination, end marijuana criminalization, and save millions in much needed public funds."

If passed by the City Council, the measure would go on the November 2024 ballot along with other proposed City Charter amendments.

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