



HB 196: End the Economic Life Sentence for Cannabis Possession

Rep. Jonah Wheeler's HB 196 would remove the economic life sentence for cannabis possession — a grossly disproportionate penalty for conduct that half of the population has engaged in. With his anticipated committee amendment, HB 196 would give the Department of Safety and courts 18 months to annul records for cannabis possession from prior to January 1, 2025, excluding any cases where a person is still on probation or in jail.

Criminal records trigger thousands of collateral consequences that make it difficult to get housing, an education, and employment.

Criminal records close the door of opportunity, crush dreams, and make it hard to earn a living.

New Hampshire denies a wide array of occupational licenses and certifications to those with misdemeanor records

including as a deaf/hard of hearing interpreter, home inspector, soil/wetland scientist, geologist, landscape architect, EMS provider, chiropractor, veterinarian, mental health practitioner, dentist, driving instructor, family mediator, and court reporter.

State-initiated annulment is essential. New Hampshire allows petition-based annulment for up to $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce of cannabis, the amount that was decriminalized in 2017. But filing a petition is cumbersome. Those whose lives are the most severely impacted by an arrest are the least likely to have the means to file for relief. University of Michigan researchers found only 6.5% of those eligible successfully filed for expungement.

HB 196 is a modest step. A dozen states, including red states Oklahoma and Utah, have adopted broad Clean Slate Laws to give individuals with certain criminal records a second chance. HB 196 simply allows individuals to move on with their lives after a victimless offense that most voters favor legalizing.

Support HB 196. Stop ruining lives for cannabis possession.

Sources: ["Fully Half of Americans Have Tried Marijuana," Gallup \(8/2023\)](#), [National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction](#), [Getting Talent Back to Work \(2021\)](#), [Alliance for Justice National Survey of People with Records. \(2023\)](#), [UNH Survey Center \(6/20/2024\)](#).

By the Numbers:

83%

of employers use criminal record checks to vet candidates

164

collateral consequences in NH law on those with misdemeanors

55%

of people with records have trouble getting jobs or earning a living

65%

of NH voters believe cannabis should be legal