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## **Vermont Lawmakers to Consider Bill to Make Small Marijuana Possession a Civil Penalty**

*Recent Poll Shows 63 Percent Support for Modest Reform; Plurality of  
Vermonters Would Go Further, End Marijuana Prohibition Completely*

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MONTPELIER, Vt. — A bill to replace criminal penalties for personal possession of small amounts of marijuana with a simple fine was introduced in the statehouse today, coming on the heels of a recent poll showing overwhelming support among Vermonters for the reform.

H. 150, sponsored by Rep. David Zuckerman (P-Burlington) and 18 other representatives, would end the arrest of adults caught with an ounce or less of marijuana, instead treating the infraction as a civil violation punishable by a \$100 fine. Zuckerman said that under the bill, marijuana possession would still be illegal, but the punishment would more reasonably match the violation. He said the reform would also save tax dollars and law enforcement resources that would otherwise be wasted arresting those with small amounts of marijuana.

"There is no reason an otherwise responsible adult should face the life-altering consequences of a criminal arrest for what amounts to a minor indiscretion," Zuckerman said. "This modest reform will allow our police to quickly deal with these situations so that everybody can move on to more important matters."

According to a Mason-Dixon poll of 625 Vermont voters commissioned by the Marijuana Policy Project in Washington, D.C., and conducted by phone Jan. 9 and 10, 63 percent of respondents supported "a change in the law to provide for a \$100 civil fine without jail time for those who possess an ounce or less of marijuana for personal use." This past Election Day, Massachusetts voters passed a law similar to the one introduced in Vermont today with 65 percent of the vote.

The poll, which has a margin for error of plus or minus 4 percent, suggests that a plurality of Vermont voters would actually go much further in reforming the state's marijuana laws. Forty-nine percent of the respondents said they would favor "making marijuana legal for adults over 21, and regulating it similarly to alcohol," while only 37 percent said they would oppose the idea.

"This poll supports what we've known all along," said Nancy Lynch, executive director for VALID. "Vermonters don't want to see people ensnared in our criminal justice system for possessing a small amount of marijuana, and they see decriminalizing these violations as a modest, uncontroversial solution. Our representatives should take note – passing this bill quickly is not only responsible, it's politically popular."

If the bill passes, Vermont would become the 13th state to decriminalize small marijuana possession. According to government figures, marijuana use rates in decriminalized states are indistinguishable from those in states that arrest those caught with small amounts of marijuana.

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