

The Decriminalization of Marijuana Use and its Potential Effects on the Well-being of African Americans, P.I.: Leah J. Floyd, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

The Commonwealth of Virginia has become a part of the growing number of states to decriminalize marijuana use. Recently, Governor Ralph Northam signed into approval a bill that replaces criminal charges for simple possession of marijuana with a \$25 civil penalty (a bill to decriminalize marijuana in the commonwealth). Supporters of the decriminalization of marijuana have highlighted the positive effects that the legalization of marijuana will have on the criminal justice system. Particular attention has been given to the potential of the new law to reduce the disproportionately high arrests and unfair sentencing for the possession of marijuana experienced by African Americans. On the other hand, the negative effects of marijuana on health and social (e.g. education, employment, and income) outcomes have been downplayed. Understanding the impact of marijuana use on the health and wellbeing of African Americans is critically important, given that in the United States African Americans suffer disparities in health and social consequences across drug use groups.