



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Young

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Informational Hearing - Is Legalization of Drugs the Answer for Baltimore City?

FOR the purpose of requesting representatives of the Baltimore City Health Department and the Baltimore City Police Department to brief the council about the effects of the War on Drugs and discuss alternatives to our current drug policies; to encourage an open dialogue on the effectiveness of the imprisoning non-violent drug offenders; and examining the potential for treatment centers where care is available on demand and where drugs can be provided legally by medical professionals

Recitals

After nearly four decades of fueling the U.S. "War on Drugs" with more than a trillion tax dollars and increasingly punitive policies, our confined population has quadrupled over a 20-year period, making the building of prisons one of this nation's fastest growing industries. More than 2.2 million of our citizens are currently incarcerated. In the last five years we have arrested 9 million people for nonviolent drug offenses--far more per capita than any country in the world. The United States has 4.6% of the world's population but 22.5% of the world's prisoners.

Every year that we continue this war will cost the United States another 69 billion dollars. Despite all the lives destroyed and all the money so ill spent, illicit drugs are cheaper, more potent, and much easier to get than they were 36 years ago. Meanwhile, people continue dying in our streets, while drug barons and terrorists continue to grow richer than ever before.

The policies of prohibition of are often seen as the reasons for drug-related crimes. First, drug laws greatly increase the price of illegal drugs, often forcing users to steal or commit other crimes in order to obtain the means to supply their habit. Although it is difficult to estimate, the black market prices of heroin and cocaine appear to be almost 100 times greater than their pharmaceutical prices. Because there is no quality control in the black market, prohibition also kills by making drug use more dangerous. Illegal drugs contain poisons, are of uncertain potency, and are often injected with dirty needles. Many deaths are caused by infections, accidental overdoses, and poisoning.

Many people will die of AIDS each year from using unsterilized needles. These casualties include the sexual partners and children of intravenous drug users. Drug-related AIDS is almost exclusively the result of drug prohibition. Users inject drugs rather than taking them in tablet form because tablets are expensive; they go to "shooting galleries" to avoid arrests for possessing drugs and needles; and they share needles because needles are illegal and, therefore, difficult to obtain. Legalization would help fight AIDS. First, clean needles would be made readily available, drugs in tablet form would be far less expensive, and needle sharing could be kept to a minimum.

Prohibition also stimulates crime by criminalizing users of illegal drugs, thereby creating disrespect for the law; forcing users into daily contact with professional criminals, which often leads to arrest and prison records that make legitimate employment difficult to obtain; encouraging young people to become criminals by creating an extremely lucrative black market; destroying, through drug crime, the economic viability of low-income neighborhoods, leaving young people fewer alternatives to working in the black market; and removing the settling of drug related disputes from the legal process, thereby creating a context of violence for the buying and selling of drugs.

Prohibition has an obvious negative impact on the economic viability of inner cities and their inhabitants. Prohibition-related violence and property crime raise costs, make loans and insurance difficult or impossible to secure, and make it difficult to attract skilled workers. Prohibition lures some workers away from legitimate businesses and into the black market, where "salaries" are much higher. As long as a black market in illegal drugs thrives in the inner cities, it is difficult to see how they can ever become economically viable.

For all these reasons, there needs to be an open dialogue regarding the drug policies in our great city and our great nation. While it is obvious to some that drug prohibition has done more harm than good, and that current drug policies and drug wars are simply failing policies, the discussion of legalization is often considered taboo. With so many young people being gunned down on our streets every day, the need for the discussion is more real now than it has ever been. With an open forum for discussion, we can propose positive laws that can help make our city and our nation a safer and more healthy place for our youth to grow and make positive changes to the society in which they are a part.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That this body requests that representatives of the Baltimore City Health Department and the Baltimore City Police Department brief the council about the effects of the War on Drugs and discuss alternatives to our current drug policies; to encourage an open dialogue on the effectiveness of imprisoning of non-violent drug offenders; and examining the potential for treatment centers where care is available on demand and where drugs can be provided legally by medical professionals

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, the Director of the Baltimore City Health Department, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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- 2 -

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