

# 5 reasons for Marylanders to be Grateful!

## » Why 2020 was a record-breaking year for medical Cannabis in Maryland

**As** THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES TO UPEND PLANS THIS YEAR ACROSS THE BOARD, traditional family gatherings will be giving way to a smaller, more socially distant Thanksgiving. Instead of sitting closely together in a poorly ventilated space with your family and friends and sharing food from the same serving dishes, families are taking the safe way out and staying at home. But as we commiserate over what we are missing out on, maybe it's more useful to think about why we should be thankful and how far we have come. Why was 2020 different than all other years any of us can remember?

### 1. CANNABIS DEEMED AN ESSENTIAL BUSINESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

On March 23, 2020, Governor Hogan issued an emergency order requiring all non-essential businesses in the state to close. As medical Cannabis growers, processors, dispensaries, and registered testing laboratories were state-licensed health care providers and facilities under the Health-General Article, the medical Cannabis supply chain were deemed essential businesses and were not required to close pursuant to the Governor's emergency order.

### 2. FEDERAL DECRIMINALIZATION WAS SCHEDULED FOR A HOUSE VOTE.

The Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment and Expungement ("MORE") Act was voted out of the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis. The MORE Act would federally de-schedule Cannabis, expunge the records of those with prior marijuana convictions and impose a federal five percent tax on sales – revenue from which would be reinvested in communities most impacted by the drug war. It would also create a

pathway for resentencing for those incarcerated for marijuana offenses, as well as protect immigrants from being denied citizenship over Cannabis and prevent federal agencies from denying public benefits or security clearances due to its use. Although it was supposed to be put to a full vote before the House in late September 2020, it was pulled from consideration by leadership with a promise to be raised again before the end of the session. Nevertheless, this is the first legislation involving the legal status of "marijuana," not including hemp, to be considered before the full House since the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

### 3. TWO-THIRDS OF AMERICANS SUPPORT MAKING CANNABIS LEGAL

According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 67% (two-thirds) of Americans believe the use of marijuana should be legal, representing a steady, rapid increase from a low of 16% in 1989. The share of U.S. adults who oppose legalization has also fallen rapidly from 52% opposed in 2010, to only 32% today. Meanwhile, an overwhelming majority of U.S. adults (91%) say marijuana should be legal either for medical and recreational use (59%) or that it should be legal just for medical use (32%). Fewer than one-in-ten (8%) prefer to keep marijuana illegal in all circumstances.

### 4. CANNABIS IS RECOGNIZED FOR ITS MEDICINAL PROPERTIES.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not yet approved the Cannabis plant for any medical use. However, the FDA has approved several drugs that contain individual cannabinoids. Epidiolex, which contains a purified

form of cannabidiol (CBD) derived from Cannabis, was approved for the treatment of seizures associated with two rare and severe forms of epilepsy. Marinol and Syndros contain dronabinol (synthetic THC), and Cesamet contains nabilone (a synthetic substance similar to THC). Both synthetic forms of THC are approved by the FDA. Drugs containing cannabinoids were shown to have palliative effect in treating certain rare forms of epilepsy, nausea and vomiting associated with cancer chemotherapy, and loss of appetite and weight loss associated with HIV/AIDS. In addition, some evidence suggests modest benefits of Cannabis or cannabinoids for chronic pain and multiple sclerosis symptoms.

### 5. UNINTENDED SOCIAL BENEFITS.

According to FBI crime statistics, violent crime in Washington decreased in the years after legalization. Traffic deaths dropped 11% on average in states that legalized medical marijuana. Research also indicates that people drink less and alcohol sales drop in places where marijuana has been legalized. According to the CDC, six people die from alcohol poisoning every day and 88,000 people die annually due to excessive alcohol use in the United States. There are no recorded cases of death from marijuana overdose.

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So, remember this Thanksgiving that medical Cannabis patients in Maryland (and nationwide) have much to be thankful for. The State of Maryland, and for that matter the United States as a whole,

have made rapid and significant leaps in its understanding and acceptance of Cannabis over a very short period. Very few social movements have advanced this far, this quickly. But the experiment is not over. Maybe next year when we all get together for Thanksgiving, we can do so together, without masks, without social distancing and without prejudice.

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