

190702



Inter-Departmental Communication
Health Department

DATE: September 24, 2019

TO: Mayor Lucas and City Council

FROM: Rex Archer, Health Department Director

SUBJECT: Ordinance 190702

Mayor and City Council,

Mass incarceration is one of the most significant threats to the public's health of our times. It impacts not just the individual who often (rather than having an opportunity for restorative justice) is taught additional criminal activity and when released is at an extreme disadvantage in finding legal employment, housing and economic opportunity.

These adverse health impacts are not isolated to the individual. Mass incarceration also significantly impacts family, friends, and the community at-large. Mass incarceration disconnects valuable human and economic resources from our communities, which affects the success of our region.

Almost any available avenue to reduce this scourge on our residents should be seriously considered, even if there are potential negative impacts of that approach.

It is under this rationale that the Health Department supports raising the amount of marijuana for a municipal ordinance violation to 100 grams even though there are likely to be other negative impacts of this change. As an example, prohibition was an extremely effective strategy in reducing the

prevalence of alcoholism as demonstrated from significant reduction in cirrhosis of the liver. However, the adverse side effects of contamination in the alcohol distilling process exposed people to lead toxicity and blindness from methanol consumption.

The growth in criminal activity tipped the scale to ending prohibition. After prohibition ended, alcohol abuse significantly increased.

I share this example because the risk of adverse health impacts from marijuana abuse are similar to those of alcohol abuse.

Since marijuana use is increasing among teenagers, and black teen rates are now twice as high than whites, there is significant potential for even greater inequities and injustices in incarceration rates, which further argues for reducing the chance for municipal criminal violation. Because black men and women are disproportionately incarcerated for minor drug offenses, this will lead to an even greater injustice/inequity in incarceration rates for blacks compared to whites. Therefore, we believe it is prudent to raise the limit.

Although this policy should reduce injustices in incarceration, an unfortunate, unintended byproduct may be that marijuana abuse will continue to grow in our youth population. The more important issue of concern is what are the conditions that are leading to the increased abuse of marijuana by our minority youth. We look forward to future discussions on addressing the root causes of drug abuse, including marijuana.

Sincerely,

Rex Archer, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of Health
KCMO Health Department

cc: Marilyn Sanders