

San Francisco To Toss Out Thousands of Marijuana Convictions



Summary: San Francisco will dismiss and seal marijuana-related convictions dating back to 1975.

San Francisco prosecutors said that they will dismiss thousands of marijuana-related convictions, according to [NPR](#). On Wednesday, San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón said that they will throw out cases dating back to 1975.

Gascón said that his office will dismiss and seal 3,038 marijuana misdemeanor convictions and that those affected did not have to perform any actions. He said that the 4,940 felony convictions may be reduced to misdemeanors.

"A criminal conviction can be a barrier to employment, housing, and other benefits, so instead of waiting for the community to take action, we're taking action for the community," Gascón said.

Gascón told NPR that San Francisco was "taking the lead to undo the damage that this country's disastrous, failed drug war has had on our nation and on communities of color in particular." He noted that African-Americans only comprised 7.8 percent of the city's population in 2000 but took up 41 percent of arrests for marijuana offenses. By 2010 and 2011, the percentage of African-Americans decreased but they made up about half of the marijuana-related arrests.

Recreational marijuana became legal in California on January 1, and as part of the new law, people were allowed to file for expungements of their prior convictions. However, that process is expensive, and Gascón said they had only received 23 petitions so far this year.

"A lot of people don't even know they qualify, and I don't think it's the right thing to do to make people pay lawyers' fees and jump through a bunch of hoops to get something they should be getting anyway," Gascón said.

Growing, using, or possessing marijuana is still a federal crime. Recreational marijuana is allowed in nine states, and other states are considering passing similar measures.

According to the [New York Times](#), San Diego will also clear similar convictions.

Robert Mikos, a professor at Vanderbilt University who studies marijuana law and policy, told the New York Times that expunging records can be a messy process and that people can see the value of San Francisco and San Diego's recent decision.

"In all the other states, the process has been messy," said Mikos. "But whether people agree with what they did or not, California at least addressed it and there's value in that."

According to [The Independent](#), there have been almost half a million arrests for marijuana offenses in the past ten years in California. The Drug Policy Alliance said that almost a million people have reviewable convictions on their records.

- [Recreational Marijuana Will Be Legal in California in 2018](#)
- [Study Links Legalized Marijuana to Car Crashes](#)
- [Study Finds Link in Marijuana Stores with Increased Property Crime](#)

What do you think of San Francisco's decision? Let us know in the comments below.