

POLICY PROPOSAL FOR ENDING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN RILEY COUNTY MARIJUANA ARRESTS

ADOPTED BY CONGREGATIONAL VOTE ON FEBRUARY 22, 2015

In June 2013, the American Civil Liberties Union published a 185-page report, "The War on Marijuana, in Black and White." The report presents original research exposing a pattern of racial bias in marijuana possession arrests nationwide, in each state, and in selected counties in each state, including Riley County, KS. According to the report, in the USA as a whole, black persons are 3.7 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white persons and in Kansas 4.4 times more likely. Most importantly, the report documents that the actual use of marijuana is roughly the same for white and black Americans.

We agree with the ACLU's conclusion that racial bias, whether conscious or unconscious, is the only credible explanation "behind the consistent and widespread racial disparities in marijuana possession arrest rates in the vast majority of counties in this country." We agree also that this bias must be challenged as a violation of the fundamental principle of equality under law. We now know that the national pattern of bias is evident here in our own community. The ACLU report has found that in Riley County police are three times more likely to arrest black persons than white persons for marijuana possession.

To address this injustice, we urge the Riley County Police Department to adopt the following policy:

1. In a manner consistent with RCPD protocol, inform all RCPD officers of the findings of the ACLU report, "The War on Marijuana in Black and White," and explain that the report offers credible evidence that RCPD officers engage in racial profiling (perhaps unconsciously) in their decisions on who to stop, who to search, or who to arrest.
2. Inform RCPD officers that the Department is committed to the elimination of racial disparities in marijuana possession arrests. The Department's goal will be to reduce the arrest rate of African Americans until they are no higher than the arrest rates of white Americans.
3. Develop a plan for reaching this goal, to include (a) training officers to recognize and resist any tendency to profile racial minorities in decisions on stops, searches, and arrests, and (b) reviewing past, current, and future RCPD arrest statistics to test for progress towards the equal enforcement of state law prohibiting marijuana use.
4. Establish as formal policy that arrests for marijuana possession are a low departmental priority and will not be used as a measure of an officer's merit or effectiveness as a keeper of the peace, that the RCPD will not conduct aggressive stop and search operations aimed at marijuana possession arrests, and will not accept funds, either directly or indirectly, from federal and state programs intended for such use.