

# The Star-Ledger

## **N.J. should stop marijuana possession arrests now that voters have OK'd legal weed, top lawmaker says**

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New Jersey's most powerful lawmaker asked the state's top cop Monday to halt all marijuana possession arrests since residents voted overwhelmingly for legalization.

"No one should be arrested and face criminal charges for possession of minimal amounts of marijuana now that the people have spoken," state Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, said in a statement.

State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal should "use his legal and moral authority" to tell law enforcement agencies statewide to stop all arrests and prosecutions for anyone possessing "amounts of marijuana that would be considered personal use," Sweeney said.

"It's time for these arrests that have disproportionately affected people of color to stop," he said, a reference to research showing Black residents are far more likely to be picked up for weed.

The day after Election Day, Grewal issued a short statement reminding residents that lawmakers still needed to approve regulations before marijuana was technically legal.

New Jerseyans should not "inadvertently engage in criminal conduct relating to marijuana — conduct that may be legal in the future once the Legislature acts, but is not presently legal based on yesterday's vote," Grewal said. He promised more guidance for local cops "soon," and he said officers already had "broad discretion" when handling "low-level marijuana offenses."

A Grewal spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment about Sweeney's statement. Grewal has more power than many state attorneys general, and he can give orders that apply to every cop in the state.

Grewal has previously declined to give his personal views of marijuana, saying he's bound to enforce the law as it is.

Lawmakers on Friday introduced two marijuana bills, one to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana and one to regulate the new industry, but each must be approved by the state Assembly and Senate before it can head to the governor's desk. Both bills are set for committee hearings Monday.

Gov. Phil Murphy has supported legalization, but he previously backed his attorney general and declined to call for all arrests to stop.

State Assemblyman Jamel Holley, D-Union, went further, telling NJ Advance Media that all marijuana possession cases in municipal court should also be dismissed, although that change would require more than an order from Grewal.