



VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: DRUG POLICY RECORD

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Drug Policy Action believes that drug policy should be grounded in evidence, health, equity, and human rights. The 2024 U.S. presidential election will have critical implications for drug policy nationwide. It's important you know the facts about each candidate's record and history.

HARRIS' DRUG POLICY RECORD HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME

Vice President Kamala Harris' positions on drug policy have evolved over the course of her decades-long political career. If elected, Harris will be the first U.S. president to support the federal decriminalization and legalization of marijuana. As a U.S. Senator representing California, she created a record of championing criminal legal reforms, with an emphasis on reentry initiatives and reforming marijuana laws and the cash bail system.

As a 2020 presidential candidate, she released her own comprehensive criminal legal reform plan that seeks to shift away from mass incarceration. In 2018, she expressed support for marijuana legalization. She has also committed to ending the war on drugs.^{1,2,3}

HARRIS SUPPORTS MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

Since announcing her support for Senator Cory Booker's 2018 Marijuana Justice Act, which would remove marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act, Harris has continued to push for the legalization of marijuana.⁴ She was the leading U.S. Senate cosponsor of the MORE Act, which at the time was the most far-reaching marijuana bill in Congress.

The Biden-Harris administration pardoned thousands of people who were convicted of use and simple possession of marijuana, though it excluded people with state-level marijuana convictions, some non-citizens, military service members, people convicted for selling marijuana, and other drug war victims.^{5,6} The administration also signed into law a historic marijuana research bill, something Harris pushed for as a senator.^{7,8}

Though Harris has been an ardent supporter of marijuana reform since 2018, her previous record as attorney general and district attorney failed to consistently advance justice. In 2014, she declined to take a position on Proposition 47, a California ballot initiative approved by voters that reduced certain low-level felonies to misdemeanors.⁹ She also opposed a 2010 measure to legalize marijuana in California, and co-wrote the argument against it that appeared in the voter guide.¹⁰ During her tenure as district attorney in San Francisco, over 1,900 individuals were convicted for marijuana offenses, though most did not serve time in jail.¹¹

KEY FEDERAL LEGISLATION SUPPORTED BY HARRIS

- Sponsored [Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement \(MORE\) Act of 2019](#)
- Original cosponsor of the [Marijuana Justice Act of 2019](#)

HARRIS SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DRUG CONVICTIONS

As district attorney, Harris launched a reentry initiative called "Back on Track" to give people with first-time low-level drug convictions an

opportunity to have their criminal records cleaned for participating in a strict “self-improvement” program. The program was acclaimed for its relatively low recidivism rate and cost-savings. As attorney general, Harris expanded the “Back on Track” program to include people serving jail time, granting educational opportunities to help ensure a successful transition post-incarceration.^{12,13}

KEY FEDERAL LEGISLATION SUPPORTED BY HARRIS:

- Sponsored [Fair Chance at Housing Act of 2019](#)
- Sponsored [Pretrial Integrity and Safety Act of 2017](#)
- Sponsored [Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018](#)
- Original cosponsor of [Justice in Policing Act of 2020](#), [Smarter Sentencing Act of 2019](#), and [PROFILED Act](#)

HARRIS SUPPORTS A HEALTH-BASED APPROACH TO THE OVERDOSE CRISIS

Harris has held a consistent health-based approach to the overdose crisis. Most recently, the Biden-Harris administration allocated more than \$1.5 billion to address the overdose crisis, increasing access to evidence-based treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services.¹⁴ Previously, Harris released a plan for Medicare For All, emphasized the importance of “major federal mobilization” for the opioid crisis, and fought for better access to opioid addiction treatment.^{15, 16, 17}

Despite support for a health-based approach, the Biden-Harris administration has often fallen short on providing adequate funding and services needed to match the scale of the overdose crisis. And despite saying drug use should be a health issue, the Biden-Harris Administration has increased funding for drug enforcement and interdiction and also advocated for the scheduling of fentanyl, xylazine, and other synthetic substances¹⁸ which will increase harsh criminal penalties for drugs at the federal level.

KEY FEDERAL LEGISLATION SUPPORTED BY HARRIS:

- Sponsored [Accountability in Opioid Advertising Act of 2018](#)
- Original cosponsor of [CARE Act](#) and [Opioid Crisis Accountability Act of 2019](#)

If you have questions about this information please contact our Director of Federal Affairs Maritza Perez Medina at mperez@drugpolicy.org.

Visit www.drugpolicy.org/OverdosePlan to learn about our campaign demanding an overdose prevention plan from the presidential candidates.

Drug Policy Action works to pass new drug laws and policies grounded in evidence, health, equity, and human rights — and undertakes a wide range of activities including political advocacy and electoral work to support these principles. Drug Policy Action is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit 501(c)(4) organization, and is the advocacy and political partner of the Drug Policy Alliance. Learn more at drugpolicyaction.org.

END NOTES

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