

# OHIO CAN RELY ON EVIDENCE THAT RECLASSIFYING LOW-LEVEL DRUG POSSESSION HAS POSITIVE RESULTS

**Source: Reclassified - Urban Institute - October 2018**

Ohio is considering changes to drug sentencing laws, and policymakers should rely on a growing body of evidence that demonstrates felony convictions and incarceration to be ineffective responses to drug abuse. Research instead shows that treatment in the community produces better public safety results. That is why Urban Institute's *Reclassified* report includes the recommendation to reclassify drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor focusing the savings on evidence-based strategies proven to reduce substance abuse.

Five states have recently reclassified simple drug possession as a misdemeanor with broad bipartisan support among policymakers and voters (Alaska, California, Connecticut, Oklahoma and Utah) to early positive results.

## **Research compiled by Urban Institute for its *Reclassified* report highlighted important findings:**

- Over 80 percent of arrests for drug law violations are for drug possession alone.<sup>1</sup>
- Research suggests that reclassifying drug possession, reducing arrests, felony convictions, and incarceration can increase opportunities for successful treatment in communities.<sup>2</sup>
- Evidence shows more punitive criminal justice responses, such as felony convictions, are not effective tools to deter drug use or mitigate the harm it causes.
- Instead, felony convictions have lasting negative impacts, including restrictions to jobs that contribute to high unemployment rates, low productivity, and financial insecurity.

- Evidence suggests that compared with incarceration, community-based treatment programs are more effective at reducing substance abuse and helping people recover.<sup>3</sup>
- The states that have already reclassified drug possession have reduced wasteful spending on imprisoning people with addiction these savings have been reinvested in programs that reduce recidivism and improve public safety.
- Decades of evidence demonstrates that incarceration increases recidivism for people who are at low risk to reoffend or have needs related to substance abuse, drug addiction, or mental illness.<sup>4</sup>
- Reducing incarceration for drug offenses can produce significant public safety benefits when paired with investments in drug treatment and crime prevention strategies.
- States that have reduced imprisonment the most have seen the largest declines in crime.<sup>5</sup>

## References

1. Drug Policy Alliance, “The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race” (New York: Drug Policy Alliance, 2016).
2. Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “Prison, Police, and Programs: Evidence-Based Options that Reduce Crime and Save Money” (Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2013).
3. Latessa and Lowenkamp, “What Works in Reducing Recidivism?”
4. The Pew Charitable Trusts, “Alaska’s Criminal Justice Reforms.”
5. Daniel S. Nagin, Francis T. Cullen and Cheryl Lero Jonson, “Imprisonment and Reoffending,” *Crime and Justice* 38, no. 1 (2009): 115–200.  
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