

I'm providing some background material here that will hopefully make the Committee's conversation with the Councilmember more productive.

In early 2013, new studies showed that despite relatively equal use of marijuana among black and white residents, 9 out of 10 arrests for marijuana in D.C. were African Americans.

In July of that year, a number of members of the D.C. Council introduced legislation to decriminalize the possession of a small amount of marijuana: <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B20-0409?FromSearchResults=true>

Feeling that the decriminalization law did not go far enough to address the racial discrimination issue, Councilmember Grosso introduced legislation in September to allow for the taxation and regulation of marijuana: <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B20-0466?FromSearchResults=true> Grosso re-introduced a revised version of the law in January of 2015: <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B21-0023?FromSearchResults=true> Grosso also introduced a bill to seal the records of those previously charged or convicted of non-violent marijuana-related offenses: <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B20-0467?FromSearchResults=true>

The decriminalization bill passed and became law in July 2014. Meanwhile, residents began collecting signatures to get a referendum on the 2014 ballot to legalize personal possession and use and home cultivation of small amounts of marijuana—this became known as Initiative 71.

Opinions shifted on the Council and members became more receptive to a tax and regulate system as it became clear that Initiative 71 would pass. Two committees held a hearing on Grosso's tax and regulate bill but the other relevant committee did not, so it did not advance. Initiative 71 did pass in November 2014 with over 65% of the vote: <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B20-1064?FromSearchResults=true>

Meanwhile, when Congress passed its budget in December of 2014, Congressman Andy Harris included a rider on D.C.'s budget (as Congress can always do, because of our lack of statehood or legislative/budget autonomy) to prohibit D.C. from creating a tax and regulate system. Harris' rider was meant to block the enactment of Initiative 71 as well but the wording of the rider failed to do so. Initiative 71 could not set up a regulatory and tax system because of the referendum law in D.C., which prohibits resident-led ballot initiatives from having any fiscal impact. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/how-dc-pot-legalization-has-become-the-dealer-protection-act-of-2015/2015/05/17/5cbcd730-f28d-11e4-b2f3-af5479e6bbdd_story.html <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/01/08/defiant-dc-politicians-push-ahead-with-pot-legalization>

So, D.C. did not decide to pursue the current course of action regarding marijuana regulation but was forced into this position due to Congress exercising its authority to prohibit D.C. from spending any of our local dollars as we please, something Congress cannot do to any other jurisdiction in the country. Councilmember Grosso can certainly speak to all of this and the lessons learned but it is important that the Committee understand the context that this comes in. Perhaps the Vermont legislature would like to pass a resolution in support of D.C. statehood, or at least encouraging Congress to remove the Harris rider ☺

Let me know if anything is unclear or if you have other questions.

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Pronouns: she, her, hers

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