

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3208

May 24, 2014

William J. Bratton
Commissioner
New York City Police Department
1 Police Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10038

Dear Commissioner Bratton:

I write with respect to the New York Police Department (NYPD) marijuana arrest policy and the deeply troubling racial disparities that continue to disproportionately impact communities of color.

Although modest progress was made during the final year of the Bloomberg administration, New York City remains the marijuana arrest capitol of America. Last year, 28,644 people were arrested for possession of small quantities of marijuana.¹ This amount is 12 times more a year than under Mayor Edward I. Koch, 28 times more than under Mayor David N. Dinkins, and it is even greater than the eight year average of arrests under Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani.

The new administration promised to do better. Yet, according to recent data by the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, the New York Police Department remains on pace to equal the volume of arrests for possession of small quantities of marijuana in 2014 as compared to the previous year.

Eighty-six percent of the individuals arrested in the first quarter of 2014 were African-Americans and Latinos, even though whites use marijuana at equal or higher numbers.² There is no justification for the racially uneven law enforcement approach to marijuana arrest policy. It must change.

In 2011, after significant community pressure to reform its racially charged practices, former

¹ "Marijuana Arrests Research Project" New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. <http://marijuana-arrests.com/> May 2014

² "7,017 individuals were arrested for possession of small quantities of marijuana between January 2014 and March 2014" *NYPD Marijuana Possession Arrests by Race and Ethnicity in The Last Two Quarters of 2013 under Bloomberg and Kelly, and the First Quarter of 2014, under de Blasio and Bratton*, Page 3.

Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly issued an internal order to NYPD commanding officers to discontinue arresting individuals for possession of small amounts of marijuana, if the substance was never in public view. Given the alarmingly high number of arrests that continue to be made by the NYPD, it appears that this directive has not been fully embraced by the officers now under your command.

Accordingly, I strongly urge the NYPD to completely implement a marijuana arrest policy consistent with the directive issued in 2011 and enforce the law in a race neutral fashion. All New Yorkers, regardless of skin color, should be treated the same.

Thank you in advance for your careful attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hakeem S. Jeffries', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

HAKEEM S. JEFFRIES
Member of Congress