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By **Steven Gothrin** May 23, 2026



A coalition of Democratic U.S. lawmakers is advocating for the commutation of sentences for federal cannabis prisoners, citing the administration's move t...



Lawmakers Advocate for Commutation of Federal Cannabis Prisoners

A coalition of Democratic members from the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate has formally urged President Donald Trump to commute the sentences of individuals currently serving time in federal prison for marijuana-related offenses. This initiative follows the administration's directive to [reschedule cannabis](#) under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), a move that, as previously reported by Hemp Gazette, has significant implications for federal drug policy. The lawmakers argue that while rescheduling addresses the scientific classification of cannabis, it does not provide relief for those already incarcerated.

The letter, sent on Friday and led by Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Representative Steven Horsford (D-NV), highlighted that the inclusion of marijuana in the CSA has resulted in millions of incarcerations over decades. The communication, addressed to President Trump and his pardon czar, Alice Marie Johnson, states that the President has a "unique opportunity to use your constitutional authority and issue a categorical commutation to address this continuing injustice."

Legal and Systemic Arguments for Commutation

The lawmakers' letter outlines several justifications for the commutation of sentences for federal cannabis prisoners:

- **Disproportionate Sentencing:** Individuals convicted for cannabis offenses often face lengthy sentences. U.S. Sentencing Commission data indicates approximately 3,000 individuals remain federally incarcerated for marijuana trafficking offenses, with many serving mandatory minimum sentences of five years or longer.
- **Racial Disparity:** The enforcement of cannabis laws has been conducted in a racially disparate manner, contributing to systemic inequities.
- **Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Capacity:** Releasing these prisoners could assist the BOP in managing capacity issues, including overcrowding and understaffing. The letter suggests that commuting these sentences would address overly harsh penalties while allowing the BOP to reallocate resources.
- **Re-entry Support:** The coalition also requested that individuals released from "unjust marijuana sentences" be provided with support services to facilitate successful re-entry into society after years of incarceration.

The letter was co-signed by 26 other House and Senate colleagues, including Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), and Ed Markey (D-MA), as reported by [Marijuana Moment](#).

Broader Legislative Context

This push for commutations occurs amidst several other legislative developments concerning cannabis policy in the U.S. Congress:



- **Safety-Sensitive Workers:** A separate initiative saw Republican lawmakers collaborate with anti-marijuana groups to advocate for a “carve-out” ensuring continued drug testing and penalties for cannabis use among safety-sensitive workers.
- **Veterans’ Access:** The House of Representatives recently passed a bipartisan amendment that would permit military veterans to receive medical cannabis recommendations from their Department of Veterans Affairs doctors.
- **DOJ Rescheduling and State Protections:** The House Appropriations Committee approved a bill containing provisions that would block the Department of Justice from taking further steps to reschedule cannabis, while simultaneously continuing to protect state medical marijuana laws from federal interference. A report attached to this legislation also directs federal officials to take enforcement action against unregulated cannabinoid products deemed to pose a risk to consumer safety.
- **Industrial Hemp:** The full House also passed a Farm Bill with provisions aimed at aiding industrial hemp producers, though without language to delay or alter the federal recriminalization of hemp THC products scheduled to take effect later this year.

These legislative actions collectively underscore the complex and evolving landscape of [federal cannabis policy](#), with the issue of federal cannabis prisoners remaining a central point of debate as rescheduling efforts proceed.

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