April Newsletter

**Trump Escalates the International War on Drugs to Distract from Delayed COVID-19 Response**

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 crisis in the U.S., President Trump has announced his intention to send Navy ships toward Venezuela, intensifying American involvement in the international war on drugs.

In an apparent effort to distract Americans from his delayed response to the COVID-19 crisis – which at this point we know will likely cost hundreds of thousands of lives – Trump is choosing to double down on the cruel and inhumane international war on drugs, which has already devastated countless communities domestically and abroad. By allocating scarce and valuable personal protective equipment (PPE) to soldiers for the escalation of this ineffective and elective war, Trump is preventing these vital supplies from reaching the hands of our doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers, who are fighting a critical battle across the country and begging in vain every day for these resources.

Meanwhile, more people serving time on federal drug charges have been pronounced dead of COVID-19 and others will follow. This highlights how the federal government's inaction to reduce prison capacity to ensure the health and wellness of those in its custody is causing devastating results.

[Read DPA's full response to President Trump's announcement](#)

**DPA Urges Policymakers to Protect People Most at Risk During COVID-19**

As the COVID-19 crisis escalates, DPA is calling for policymakers to protect the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable community members, including the incarcerated, homeless, those with substance use disorder, those who rely on access to medication-assisted treatment or medical marijuana, and...
immigrants.

We worry that people who use drugs will face even more challenges to access life-saving harm reduction services and medications. We know that people who are incarcerated and detained will remain stuck in crowded, unsanitary spaces, and people without housing will struggle to manage risks without adequate supports, resources, or medical care. We will continue to work in coalition with our partners to prioritize the needs of these communities.

Richard Burns, Interim Executive Director of the Drug Policy Alliance, said:

“It is vital that policymakers put public health above all else right now to ensure the health and safety of vulnerable people as well as broader society. We must urgently start reducing capacity in jails, prisons, and immigrant detention centers by releasing older people and others that pose no risk to public safety. We must immediately halt the arrest and prosecution of people for minor offenses like drug possession, sex work and other various ‘crimes of poverty’, as some prosecutors who recognize the gravity of the pandemic have already begun doing.”

“This will take those most at risk of contracting COVID-19 out of harm’s way and free up important public safety resources to assist with the ongoing crisis. To continue haphazardly with business as usual in this regard is to let the ship go down with the lifeboats still attached. We can and must act now.”

Many of our allies have created useful resources for protecting our community during this critical time. Please visit the link below to learn how to protect yourselves and others:

Visit our COVID-19 Resources page.

Marijuana Legalization Left Out of New York State Budget

For the second year in a row, New York legislators have dropped adult-use marijuana legalization from the state’s annual budget. Governor Andrew Cuomo said many details need to be examined before legalization could be considered, and that doing so had become impossible as the state focused on the COVID-19 crisis.

DPA has led a multiyear campaign to legalize marijuana in New York, and we played a pivotal role in encouraging Governor Cuomo’s support for legalization – making it a key issue in the ongoing legislative session. Kassandra Frederique, Managing Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns at DPA, said:
While legalizing marijuana is necessary to reduce the decades of unjust, racist targeting of communities of color in New York, our state faces a public health crisis right now and efforts to contain COVID-19 demand legislators' full attention. We remain committed to seeing legalization passed in New York at a time when critical components of equity and community reinvestment can be thoroughly addressed.

“The regulation of marijuana in our state must be centered in economic and racial justice now more than ever, because we know the same communities targeted by drug enforcement are the ones with the least access to healthcare right now, the ones grappling with decades of the economic toll from criminalization, with low wages, unstable housing, and the ones losing jobs and loved ones at the same time. The creation of a diversified and equitable industry that supports New York-based small businesses farmers will be imperative coming out of this crisis.”

“When the dust settles and New York has survived this pandemic, these communities that are on the frontlines of this crisis – in addition to the legacy of harmful enforcement – must be the center of our rebuilding effort.”

Read more.

Our Office May Be Closed, but the Work Continues

DPA’s offices may be closed because of the COVID-19 crisis, but our staff are still working together to fight for drug policy reform - from home.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a public health crisis that is affecting all of us – and we at the Drug Policy Alliance are doing all we can to respond to this pandemic, protect those we serve, and carry out our shared mission.
Your support is crucial in this time of crisis. An automatic monthly donation provides DPA with the reliable and consistent support required to step up in this time of need and continue to advocate for policies grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights. Thank you.

Make an automatic monthly donation today.

DPA Clips, Podcasts, and Stories

The Tragic Death of Patrick Jones, the First COVID-19 Fatality in the Federal U.S. Prison System

The tragic death of Patrick Jones, a 49-year-old man serving a 27-year prison sentence for a drug offense, is the first of what we anticipate will be many preventable deaths to COVID-19. Authorities said that Jones had “long-term, pre-existing medical conditions” placing him at greater risk.

“There are 450,000 people currently incarcerated for a drug related charge, and even if you released them all it would not be enough to flatten the curve in the criminal legal system”, warned Kassandra Frederique, DPA’s Managing Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns. “In Mr. Jones’ facility alone, a total of 30 incarcerated individuals and staff have tested positive for COVID-19. There will be more Patrick Jones’ and DPA stands with our fellow criminal justice reform allies in calling for the release of people inside of jails, prisons, and detention centers.”

"We are standing at the precipice of a systematic mass casualty event. Our system actors need to do everything they can to flatten the curve of mass criminalization so that we might come through this pandemic with as much of our collective humanity intact as possible."

Read more.

Congress is Failing to Protect Incarcerated People in COVID-19 Stimulus Deal
Congress is failing to adequately prioritize the protection of people in our nation's criminal legal system who are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 exposure. DPA has urged Congress to immediately pass additional stimulus legislation to protect the health of incarcerated people.

Maritza Perez, Director of DPA's Office of National Affairs, said:

"While there are some modest provisions in the stimulus package that can help provide some support if utilized properly by the Federal Bureau of Prisons as well as state and local officials, it is unconscionable that Congress has failed to provide a robust plan that adequately mirrors the extent of the threat facing this vulnerable population."

"Reports are streaming in from all over the country of COVID-19 infections rapidly spreading inside jails and prisons as well as immigration detention facilities where inadequate sanitation and overcrowded conditions put individuals at alarmingly high risk of exposure. These vulnerabilities are compounded by disproportionately high rates of serious health conditions among these populations. With them being under the custody of the government, they are entirely and understandably reliant on it to provide them with adequate protection and health care. Jails and prisons are not only inappropriate places to manage public health crisis, they are also incapable as proven by the rapidly resulting humanitarian crisis within them right now. People sentenced to serve time should not be handed a death sentence in this pandemic."

Read more.

Made of Millions and DPA Partner for Drug Education Web Series

Coinciding with National Drugs and Alcohol Facts Week, global mental health advocacy non-profit Made of Millions, in partnership with the Drug Policy Alliance, has launched First of All, a web series hosted by DPA's Safety First Senior Program Manager, Sasha Simon. The program addresses drug use, drug policy, and mental health with a destigmatized approach based in harm reduction. The first episode went live March 30, and will continue with new episodes being live streamed on YouTube every Monday.

“Our goal is to make harm reduction-based drug education resources as
accessible as possible, and the reality is that most young people receive their information online,” said Simon. “In our collaboration with Made of Millions developing First of All, we found a way to communicate the greater cultural, political, and scientific forces affecting drug use and why it is time to reconsider how we teach Americans about drugs.”

Simon added: “There aren’t many existing alternatives to the abstinence-based models for K-12 grades, but we’ve seen through the successes of comprehensive sex education, for example, how well harm reduction models work. Giving teens accurate, skills-based information is more effective than telling them how to act.”

Made of Millions co-founder Aaron Harvey agreed, explaining, “By partnering with DPA, we hope to increase awareness and understanding of harm reduction drug approaches. Addiction is a mental health issue and we want to support the lifesaving work DPA is doing.”

Watch the new web series.

Drug Policy in the News

New York Times: Virus Outbreak Creates New Challenges for Addiction Recovery

VOICE Online: Overdose Deaths Spike in Vancouver Amidst COVID-19

New York Times: With Meetings Banned, Millions Struggle to Stay Sober On Their Own.

Before It’s News: DEA: Faced with Coronavirus, Big Cities Begin to Forego Drug Arrests, Prosecutions

Culture Magazine: Oregon Dispensaries Now Offer Curbside Pickup

The Spokesman Review: Marijuana Deemed ‘Essential’ in Washington, Gets Looser Rules Amid the Coronavirus Outbreak

Have you filled out the Census?

As we all stay at home, there’s never been a better time to complete the U.S. Census. The data you provide determines how Congressional seats are distributed. It also informs some of our nation’s most important
decisions, including the federal government’s spending on vital services like healthcare and education. When you respond to the census, you help your community gets its fair share.

Find out about responding to the Census here.

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131 West 33rd St., 15th Floor New York, NY 10001

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