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**City Council Members, Community Groups Call for End to NYC's
Racially Biased, Costly Marijuana Arrest Crusade**

**New City Council Resolution Highlights Illegal Searches, Targeting of
Youth of Color, and \$75 Million Wasted on Marijuana Arrests;
Calls for Albany to Pass Bi-Partisan Reform Legislation**

**Resolution Comes on Heels of Mayor Bloomberg's New Initiative to Keep
Young Black and Latino Men out of Criminal Justice System; Simply
Following Existing NY Marijuana Decriminalization Law of 1977 Would
Significantly Reduce Arrests of Young Men of Color**

NEW YORK – On Wednesday, community groups joined with Assembly member Hakeem Jeffries and City Council Members Melissa Mark Viverito, Robert Jackson, Letitia James, Brad Lander, Ydanis Rodriguez, Jumaane Williams, Gale Brewer, James Sanders, and others as the Council introduced a resolution calling for an end to the racially biased, costly marijuana arrest crusade in NYC. The Resolution calls on the Legislature to pass the bipartisan proposal to fix the law (S.5187 – Grisanti /A.7620 – Jeffries).

Under the Albany proposal (S.5187 / A. 7620), possession and use of any amount of marijuana would remain illegal; penalties for both private and public possession of 25 grams or less of marijuana would be standardized. Violators could be punished by a court summons and fine, while multiple violations could lead to a jail sentence. The legislation has numerous co-sponsors.

“This resolution will send a strong message that we must close the loopholes in the law around marijuana enforcement that allow tens of thousands of young people to be criminalized and arrested for low-level offenses each year,” said **Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “These rampant marijuana arrests disproportionately target Black and Latino communities and costs the city tens of millions in taxpayer dollars each year. In a time of scant resources, these funds could be better allocated to the pursuit of individuals that actually pose a real threat to our neighborhoods. This overzealous enforcement corrupts the original intent of the State law which decriminalized small-time marijuana possession in the 1970s. I thank Senator Grisanti and Assemblyman Jeffries for introducing the legislation needed to make clear that the decriminalization of marijuana applies even when it is in public view.”

"The explosion of low level marijuana arrests in New York City is a tremendous waste of precious law enforcement resources and needlessly scars thousands of young lives," said

Assembly member Hakeem Jeffries, sponsor of bipartisan reform legislation in Albany. “Our legislation is an additional step toward a more equitable criminal justice system that treats everyone the same regardless of race or socioeconomic status.”

The City Council resolution comes on the heels of Mayor Bloomberg’s launch of a \$130 million initiative to assist Black and Latino young men, especially around issues of criminal justice involvement; the mayor is contributing over \$30 million of his own money to the endeavor. Meanwhile, NYPD continues to arrest tens of thousands of Black and Latino young men every year for possession of small amounts of marijuana – the arrests are too often the result of illegal searches, and the charges are often false. Most of those arrested are handcuffed, taken to the precinct, fingerprinted, photographed, held in jail for 24 - 48 hours, and then released -- with a criminal record.

The mayor could take a dramatic step towards helping Black and Latino young men by simply ending the illegal, racially biased and costly marijuana arrest crusade.

“I am proud to support Assembly Member Jeffries and Senator Gristani’s legislation to put a stop to the unjust stop and frisk policy that is endangering the young black and Latino men of this city,” said **CM Jumaane Williams**. Stop and frisk is a racist practice, plain and simple, and it is an abuse of power. Mayor Bloomberg declared his support for young black and Latino men to the tune of \$30 million, but how supportive is he when he spends \$75 million to arrest them under this policy? Arresting these youth for what amounts to low-level marijuana violations makes no sense, either financially or morally. If the Mayor wants to treat these young men like second-class citizens, at least let them know. That way, they can act accordingly.”

“I’m aghast that the NYPD has made marijuana possession a top arrest priority,” said **CM Letitia James**. “Our youth already have to worry about the lack of available jobs, which is difficult enough, the last thing they need is to be victims of illegal searches. These “stop and frisk” arrests are leading to the systematic humiliation and harassment of Black and Latino residents, and the NYPD is only creating a greater divide between the officers and the people they serve.”

While Mayor Bloomberg opposes the reforms to end the massive arrest crusade, NYPD is making even more marijuana possession arrests than it did in 2010: in the first two quarters of 2011, marijuana possession arrests in New York City are up nearly 10 percent from the same period in 2010. In the same period, there were nearly 30,000 arrests for marijuana possession statewide; more than 27,000 of those arrests took place in New York City. At its current rate, the NYPD is on target to make nearly 60,000 marijuana possession arrests in 2011—more than any other.

“Statistics show, by an overwhelming margin, that Black and Latino youths are targeted for arrests for the possession of marijuana while their white counterparts by comparison are at significantly lower risk of being arrested for the same behavior. NYPD’s practices of disproportionately criminalizing our youths for these arrests, are unwarranted and unjust- not to mention a gross misuse of our tax payer’s money. We need to support policies that push our

youths out of the school-to-prison pipeline. Stop these arrests now!" said **CM Robert Jackson**, Co-Chair of the Black, Latino and Asian Caucus.

"Last week, Mayor Bloomberg announced an initiative designed to create opportunities for young men of color. Unfortunately, under his leadership, the NYPD's overly-aggressive, often questionable marijuana arrests do exactly the opposite -- leading to an escalating interactions with the criminal justice system that reduce opportunity, increase neighborhood tensions, and do little to advance community safety," said **CM Brad Lander**. "New York City needs policing that works together with our communities to achieve safety, show respect, and protect civil liberties."

year in history.

"This common sense resolution would curtail the skyrocketing number of marijuana related arrests in the Black and Latino communities which have cost taxpayers millions of dollars without any tangible benefit to society," said **CM James Sanders**. "In fact, it has almost certainly had the opposite effect. Communities that feel alienated from society and targeted by police will tend to believe that they are under siege by a corrupt system, further enabling the mentality of crime. Arresting youth for possession of trace amounts of marijuana is both unnecessary and counter-productive to the goal of fighting crime in New York City."

"By announcing the launch of the Young Male Initiative, Mayor Bloomberg made an initial effort to address the lack of resources available to Black and Latino young men in our communities. Although the initiative has the potential to be a crucial first step in addressing the needs of our youth, much more needs to be done. The resolution introduced today at the City Council will support State legislation aimed at closing the loophole would make it a violation instead of a misdemeanor to have a small amount of marijuana in public view. The legislation would come into play during stop and frisk by NYPD in which individuals are often told to empty their pockets forcing them to expose the marijuana to the public view. This practice has led to the disproportionate arrests of so many Black and Latino young people, who can achieve anything if only given the access to opportunities and resources," said **CM Ydanis Rodriguez**

"Mayor Bloomberg, who put \$67.5 million of taxpayer money into the Young Men's Initiative, may think money talks when it comes to assisting young men of color. However, if this Initiative saw the light of day before it was snuck into the budget, we might have had a real conversation about encouraging self-sufficiency amongst Black and Latino young men, such as ending the racist and wasteful policy of marijuana arrests," said **CM Gale A. Brewer**.

Statewide, nearly 84% of all those arrested for marijuana possession are black and Latino, even though studies show that young whites use marijuana at higher rates. Furthermore, almost 70% of those arrested for possessing small amounts of marijuana are of young people aged 16-29. Among cities and counties in the U.S., Buffalo, Syracuse and New York City rank among the highest in terms of racial disparities associated with arrests for possessing small amounts of marijuana.

“While we applaud the Mayor’s launch of his new initiative we are urged to caution him on his support of police practices that unnecessarily criminalize Black and Latino youth”, and **Dr. Divine Pryor**, Executive Director of Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, which hosts the Institute for Juvenile Justice Reform and Alternatives.

"If Mayor Bloomberg cares about creating job opportunities for young Black and Latino men he must end his illegal marijuana arrest crusade," said **Alfredo Carrasquillo**, organizer for VOCAL New York. “The reality is, these costly, racially biased arrests may cancel out the benefits of his new program by blocking jobs, housing and education opportunities for young men of color in this city."

In 1977, the New York Legislature decriminalized private marijuana possession; the Legislature also declared that people should not be arrested and put through the criminal system for possessing small amounts of marijuana because the process is too expensive and too damaging to individuals and communities. But today, marijuana possession is the number one arrest in NYC. A study by Queens College professor Harry Levine found in 2010, NY taxpayers spent between \$75 - \$108 million on arresting people for small amounts of marijuana.

"NYPD does an important and challenging job for NYC residents but the \$75 million dollars they spend on arresting our kids for possession of small amounts of marijuana is a waste of precious taxpayer dollars,” said **Howard Josepher**, executive director of Exponents, a NYC-based treatment provider. “Give organizations like Exponents a fraction of these resources and we can help prevent kids from getting into drugs and give them treatment if they need it."

Mayor Bloomberg – who once said he tried and liked marijuana – lives in the 19th police precinct on the Upper-East Side of Manhattan. This precinct has the absolutely lowest rate of marijuana arrests in New York City: a mere 16 arrests a year per hundred thousand residents. This is a wealthy and overwhelmingly white neighborhood: Blacks and Latinos make up only 8% of the precinct's population.

On the other end of the continuum are the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Ocean-Hill Brownsville and East New York (precincts 73 and 75), the Manhattan neighborhoods of East Harlem and Washington Heights (precincts 25 and 33), and the neighborhood of University Heights and Fordham in the Bronx (precinct 44). The marijuana possession arrest rates in these precincts range from *100 times* the rate of Bloomberg's neighborhood to an astonishing *155 times* the rate in Ocean-Hill Brownsville. The population in these precincts is predominantly low-income and over 90% Black and Latino.

“For almost 20 years, certain New Yorkers have been subject to a racist, unconstitutional and expensive NYPD practice of making illegal marijuana arrests,” said **Kassandra Frederique**, policy associate with the Drug Policy Alliance. “City Council is taking an important step to address the everyday experiences of Black and Latino communities, and we appreciate this example of leadership. As a New Yorker, I am happy to see my elected officials taking action to stop the harassment, illegal searches and false arrests experienced by my family and friends.”

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