

Official responses to the marijuana enforcement differential

The Bethlehem Gadfly City government, Drugs, Marijuana, Southside January 18, 2020

🦋 Latest in a series of posts about the Southside 🦋

Say, didn't I just see all of you in line in front of me at Weiss market an hour or so ago?

We [posted earlier](#) about the differential in the heavy way Bethlehem police are charging residents and the lighter way Lehigh Police are charging students in front of southside judge Nancy Matos Gonzalez, a serious question, said the judge, of her ability to dispense justice equitably.

In other words, in this judge's experience the Bethlehem Police were not very often utilizing the lesser charge option made possible by the ordinance.

And it makes you wonder if Bethlehem police practice is undermining the intent of the recent ordinance decriminalizing the use of small amounts of marijuana, as well as wonder if the ordinance is applied differently in other parts of the city.

At Council January 2, the Mayor reported that the Police Chief will be meeting with the new Northampton County District Attorney Houck about his views on our new ordinance. Remember that the decriminalizing ordinance was not effective in the Lehigh County parts of Bethlehem because the Lehigh County D.A. ruled that Federal law still uniformly applies there. The former Northampton County D.A. ok'd the option for the police to decide whether to make the offense a heavy (Federal) or light (City) charge.

The Mayor's response seems solely aimed at the question of how the marijuana law is functioning in the context of the split county jurisdiction in our town.

But that's not the same question as how the police option to bring a light or a heavy charge is working.

Councilman Reynolds' request to Council seems have the necessary breadth.

CITY OF BETHLEHEM

City Council Memorandum

SUBJECT: Request for Public Safety Committee Meeting to receive update on potential enforcement patterns related to Article 744, Marijuana Possession

TO: Adam R. Waldron, President of Council

FROM: J. William Reynolds, Member of Council

DATE: January 13, 2020

Mr. Waldron,

I would like to request a meeting of the City Council Public Safety Committee for Council to receive an update from the Police Department on the status of the City's marijuana decriminalization policy established in 2018.

Specifically, I am interested in information on enforcement of Article 744, titled Marijuana Possession, and whether there are identifiable enforcement patterns in different geographic regions of the City. Moreover, I am interested in data related to potential enforcement disparities between the Northampton County and Lehigh County portions of the City.

As to the timing of the committee meeting, I respectfully ask that we schedule it far enough in advance to give ample time for the Administration to collect information and for Council to reach out to community groups, stakeholders, and citizens who may be impacted by application of the Marijuana Possession law.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.



J. William Reynolds, Member Council

Reynolds' request for a Public Safety meeting on the issue will be communicated to Council for action at next Tuesday's meeting.