

New Laws may Reform Michigan Dope Statutes

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

The laws regarding the use of marijuana may become significantly less stringent if several bills before the Michigan State House of Representatives are enacted into law.

A series of bills introduced by Rep. Dale Warner, Eaton Rapids Republican, would reclassify pot from a narcotic to a "dangerous drug," make possession of it a misdemeanor, and reduce the maximum penalty for sales to four years in prison. Currently the maximum for possession is 10 years (which is being served by John Sinclair) and the minimum for sales is twenty years.

There has not been a sales conviction in Michigan in over five years because of the harsh penalty involved and what always happens is the accused pleads guilty to the lesser charge of possession. "This has had the effect of virtually doing away with the narcotics offender's right to a trial," according to Rep. Warner.

The twenty year sentence is also used extensively by local narcotics bureaus to blackmail trapped individuals into acting as informers or agents against their friends.

Passage of the bills appears hopeful. Gov. Miliken, in a special message to the legislature on drug abuse, called for "drug laws consistent with up-to-date information and research."

The Governor's Special Committee on Drug Abuse has also recommended the repeal of the mandatory 20-year sentence for sales and indicated it felt the laws on possession were too severe.

The report said in part: "The committee does not consider marijuana similar to narcotic and dangerous drugs in its potential for abuse and therefore believes that new laws must be devised relating to the sale, possession and use of marijuana."

Because of this and the fact that most other states are taking the same approach toward marijuana laws, Rep. Warner says he believes his bills will pass either this year or next. "Each year the enlightenment grows among legislators," he said.

If the bills are passed they would have the effect of allowing those sentenced under the old laws to be re-sentenced in conformity with the new penalties. This could mean that the thousands of victims now held in Michigan prisons would be freed.



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Fifth Estate #100, March 5-18, 1970

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