



# Toolkit for Elected Officials: Steps to Local Cannabis Decriminalization in Georgia

As an elected official in Georgia, you have a powerful opportunity to advance smart, just, and community-forward cannabis policy reform by supporting or initiating local decriminalization efforts. This toolkit outlines practical steps for municipalities to decriminalize the possession of one ounce or less of cannabis within your jurisdiction.

## Step 1: Understand Georgia Law & Home Rule Authority

- Georgia law (OCGA § 16-13-2(b)) classifies possession of one ounce or less of marijuana as a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 12 months in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine.
- Municipalities in Georgia have "home rule" authority, allowing cities to establish local penalties for ordinance violations, including marijuana possession, when not in conflict with state law.
- Local decriminalization does not override state law, but cities can set enforcement priorities and reduce penalties through ordinance.

## Step 2: Review Local Enforcement Data

- Request arrest and citation data from your police department to assess the local impact of marijuana enforcement.
- Identify demographic disparities and resource impacts tied to simple possession arrests.
- Use data to build a case for reform rooted in public safety, racial equity, and fiscal responsibility.

### **Step 3: Engage Stakeholders & Build Consensus**

- Schedule meetings with community advocates, legal experts, public health officials, police leadership, and fellow councilmembers.
- Consider hosting public forums or town halls to discuss the issue and gather input.
- Leverage support from coalitions such as CARE for Georgia and civil rights organizations.

### **Step 4: Draft and Introduce a Decriminalization Ordinance**

- Work with your city attorney to draft an ordinance that reclassifies possession of less than one ounce of marijuana as a civil offense.
- Include language that removes jail time, sets a low fine (\$35–\$150), and establishes non-custodial enforcement.
- Ensure your ordinance includes exceptions for other criminal activity and respects state law boundaries.

### **Step 5: Introduce a State Resolution**

- In addition to a local ordinance, consider passing a resolution urging the Georgia General Assembly to amend OCGA § 16-13-2(b) to remove jail time statewide.
- Coordinate with other cities to amplify this request and encourage consistent policy reform.

### **Step 6: Implement, Educate, and Monitor**

- Once passed, work with local law enforcement and municipal courts to implement the ordinance.
- Provide public education on the changes, including how citations will be handled.
- Monitor outcomes and assess data regularly to evaluate the policy's impact.

### **Additional Support**

CARE for Georgia is available to assist with ordinance drafting, data analysis, community engagement, and communications strategy. Contact us at [info@CAREforGa.org](mailto:info@CAREforGa.org) or visit [www.CAREforGa.org](http://www.CAREforGa.org) for more resources.