

# 10 Reasons to Change 3 Words

Why Virginia Should Reclassify Drug Possession from a Felony to a Misdemeanor

1. Reduce mass incarceration without compromising public safety, saving tax dollars.
2. Over 4000 convicted of felony drug possession in 2018 serving over 300,000 days at a cost of over \$30M. Like all drug convictions, minorities are disproportionately affected.
3. Millions more spent on prosecution, courts, probation, and reentry services. Use that money instead for prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and other services.
4. There's little evidence that jail and especially lifelong harsh consequences deter drug use.
5. Six states across the political spectrum have reclassified drug possession - OK, CA, UT, CT, AK, CO.
6. People with felony records experience dramatically reduced job prospects. By VA law, a felony record can bar a person from working in over 100 fields from architect to dietician to real estate agent. They are barred from accessing educational loans. That's bad for the local and state economy.
7. Difficulty finding employment and housing dramatically increases the chances of homelessness in that population. Homelessness is a terrible problem. Why would government want to make it worse?
8. People that can't find decent jobs are statistically more likely to resort to illegal means of making money, often meaning theft, robbery, and selling drugs, all of which make communities less safe.
9. Reclassifying drug possession is not about being nicer to people who use drugs. It's about the kind of public policy that serves the community's overall best interests.
10. Last, but maybe most important, homes with parents without a felony record are more likely to have the kind of income that promotes stable relationships, marriage, and happy children. That bodes well for the future.

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The 3 words that need to be changed in VA Criminal Code §18.2-250 are "Class 5 felony" to "Class 1 misdemeanor", which still can carry a one-year jail sentence but doesn't carry the lifetime consequences of a felony record that serves no public benefit. For too long, Virginia politicians have talked about making addiction a public health matter and not a criminal matter. It's time they put their words into action. For more information see [reclassify.org](http://reclassify.org).