

**The Hidden Tax: Economic Costs of Marijuana Enforcement in the Bronx and New York City  
Executive Summary**

*The Hidden Tax: Economic Costs of Marijuana Enforcement in New York City*, a report by The Bronx Defenders Fundamental Fairness Project (“FFP”), documents the economic hardships that New York residents face as a result of the City’s marijuana enforcement policies. Between April and June 2014, FFP interviewed 167 people arrested for low-level marijuana possession in the Bronx. The data that FFP collected through these interviews suggest that the City’s marijuana enforcement policies and practices cost the residents of the Bronx, and New York City more broadly, millions of dollars a year in fines, court fees, and lost wages, in addition to countless missed days of work and appointments, school absences, and childcare complications. These costs and disruptions act as a hidden regressive tax on the residents of low-income communities of color and present another obstacle to economic opportunity and financial and social stability. The report’s findings underscore the urgent need for reforms that will address two of the most pressing issues associated with the City’s marijuana enforcement practices – racially disproportionate policing and the collateral costs imposed on low-income communities.

***Total Costs***

- In 2013 alone, marijuana arrests cost Bronx residents almost \$1 million in fines, fees, and lost wages.
- From 2009 through 2013, costs arising from marijuana arrests totaled \$7 million in the Bronx and a staggering \$24 million citywide.
- The costs associated with marijuana arrests fall almost exclusively on young men of color in the city’s low-income neighborhoods – communities and populations that are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks.
- These figures understate the full economic impact of marijuana enforcement in New York City. The negative consequences of marijuana arrests extend well beyond employment. Respondents interviewed for the study reported dealing with enmeshed penalties related to education, childcare, immigration status, and public housing.

***Court Costs***

- Despite the fact that the vast majority of respondents in the study never pleaded guilty to anything – either accepting adjournments in contemplation of dismissal (ACDs) or choosing to fight their cases – the total costs associated with the 167 arrests were close to \$14,000, or approximately \$84 per client.
- From 2009 through 2013, court fees and fines for marijuana possession totaled approximately \$3.3 million in the Bronx and \$11.3 million citywide.

***Missed Days of Work and Lost Wages***

- The 167 respondents missed a total of at least 76 days of work due to arrests and court dates, losing an average of \$128.13 per day. Because most people with jobs were not arrested on workdays, only 21% of those who were employed at the time of their arrests missed work as a result of their arrests. Fully 69% of people with jobs, however, were forced to miss work in order to come to their first court appearances.
- Respondents who received adjournments in contemplation of dismissal (ACDs) – and thus had no direct court-related costs – still experienced significant negative economic consequences, missing a total of 50 days of work and losing an average of \$132.41 per day.
- Family members and friends accompanying respondents to court missed an additional 17 days of work, bringing the total number of missed days in the study to 93.
- The people who are overwhelmingly and disproportionately the targets of the NYPD’s marijuana arrests are also often among the most vulnerable people in the workforce, working without employment protections and guaranteed days off. FFP found that 50% of respondents reported being employed at the time of their arrests. Of those, 55% had been at their jobs for a year or less and approximately 20% worked off the books.