

# Police chief favours ticketing for minor marijuana offences

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If you're found smoking a joint on a corner in York Region, should you end up with a criminal record?

York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe doesn't think so.

He says a more measured approach should be considered for minor pot offences — the equivalent of someone holding 30 grams of marijuana, to make about 40 joints.

For that amount, while also using officer's discretion, those who are simple users would be given a ticket, similar to what residents would receive for drinking alcohol in a public park.

Despite this modern stance, Jolliffe is quite clear, this does not mean he's in favour of decriminalization or legalization of the drug.

"It is our opinion that the illicit

use of cannabis has a negative impact on public safety and the health of young persons," he said.

However, he does believe the fresh approach to the issue would benefit his officers, residents and institutions here and across the country.

"From our perspective, what is being proposed will lessen the burden on the criminal justice system as well as our officers' time having to attend court for these relatively minor offences," he wrote in an email. "It will also allow our officers to use their discretion on a case by case basis, which is more efficient and makes good common sense."

Jolliffe, similar to many chiefs around the country, is not the only one whose view is shifting under a weight of research that suggests marijuana users should not be put through the court system.

Many, including federal Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau, who is in

favour of the government taxing and regulating the substance, agree the drug should be legalized entirely.

Colorado and Washington, for example, legalized marijuana use for adults older than 21 on Jan. 1.

Polls are showing a softening view of the drug among Canadians of all ages.

## COLORADO, WASHINGTON

The results of a national survey of 3,000 people, commissioned by the Department of Justice, showed two thirds of respondents want marijuana laws softened, but a majority says companies should not be allowed to package and sell marijuana like alcohol and cigarettes.

Meanwhile 37.3 per cent say marijuana should be legalized, 33.4 percent want small amounts decriminalized, 13.7 per cent say the laws should stay the same,

while 12 per cent say they should be strengthened.

In light of the Trudeau announcement, the Conservative government put out the following message on its website.

"These drugs are illegal because of the harmful effect they have on users and on society," the statement read. "We will continue protecting the interests of families across this country. Our government has no interest in seeing marijuana legalized."

However when it comes to Chief Jolliffe's position, which is backed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Conservative House Leader and York Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan said the government is looking into it.

The government is looking at the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police's proposal to ticket for small amounts of marijuana, he said.

"Unlike the Liberal Party, we have been very clear, we have no intention of legalizing or decriminalizing marijuana. The Chiefs of Police have also been very clear that they do not support marijuana legalisation."

Oak Ridges MP Paul Calandra said while he is personally "undecided" on the issue, the government's policy has been slowly morphing on medical marijuana policy, where the government has made significant changes and raised the option of decriminalizing small amounts of marijuana.

"Police know the difference between someone trafficking and someone using it for non-medical purposes," he said. "I haven't seen evidence either way. I have spoken to officer friends who say they would like another tool in the toolbox (ticketing for small amounts)."

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