COMMUNITY ALERT
LEGALIZED MARIJUANA

Across the nation, states are moving to legalize some use of marijuana—now, 10 states have legalized marijuana for recreational use, and 33 states and the District of Columbia have legalized some form of medical marijuana.

Immigrants may reasonably think that using marijuana according to these state laws will not hurt their immigration status. Unfortunately, that is not the case. It is still a federal offense to possess marijuana, and immigration is part of federal law.

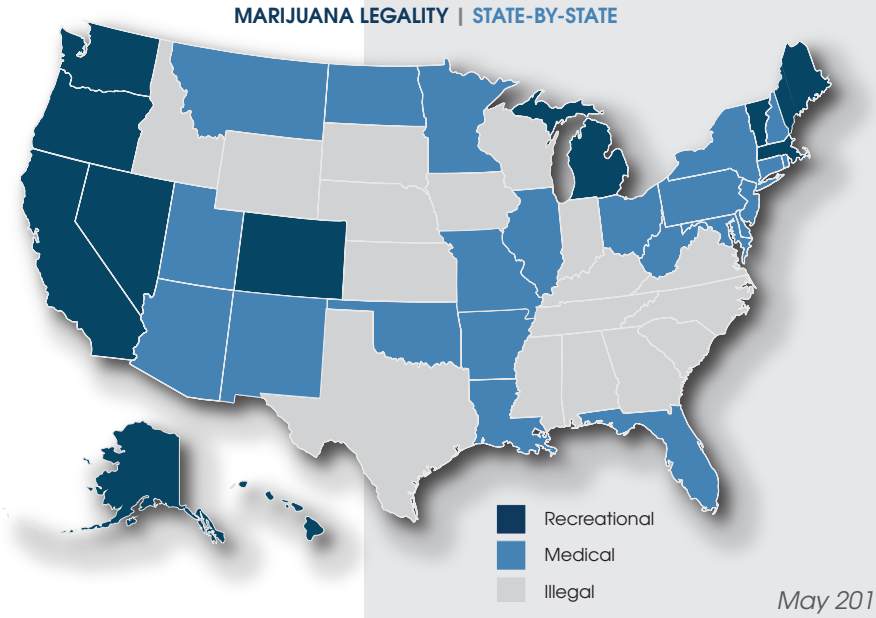
If a non-citizen admits to an immigration official that he or she has ever possessed marijuana, or even worked in the legal marijuana industry, the person can face very serious immigration problems; especially if he or she applies for a green card, applies for U.S. citizenship, travels outside the country, or ICE just questions them on the street. This is true even if the person never was convicted of a crime, just used marijuana at home, and it was permitted under state law.

Some immigration officers are asking noncitizens if they have ever used marijuana—especially in some states that have legalized marijuana.

WHAT TO DO
LEGAL SELF-DEFENSE

- Don't use marijuana until you are a U.S. citizen.
- Don't work in the marijuana industry.
- If you have a medical need and there is no good substitute for medical marijuana, get legal counsel first.
- Never leave the house carrying marijuana, a medical marijuana card, paraphernalia (like a pipe), or accessories like marijuana T-shirts or stickers.
- Don't have photos or texts about you and marijuana on your phone, Facebook, or anywhere else.
- Never discuss marijuana use or possession with any immigration or border official, unless you have expert legal advice that this is OK.
- If an official asks you about marijuana, say that you don't want to talk to them and you want to speak to a lawyer.
- You have the right to remain silent. Stay strong—once you admit it, you can't take it back. If you did admit this to a federal officer, get legal help quickly.

MARIJUANA LEGALITY | STATE-BY-STATE



May 2019