

Oakland Decriminalizes Ps



# Oakland Decriminalizes Psychedelic Mushrooms and Plants in Council Vote



BY ALEXANDER LEKHTMAN JUNE 5, 2019





**O**n June 4, the City Council of Oakland, California **\$** unanimously voted in favor of a resolution to decriminalize naturally-occurring psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, iboga and psychoactive cacti. The decision reflects growing momentum for decriminalization of psychedelics after Denver last month **became** the first US city to decriminalize mushrooms.

The resolution was drafted by Decriminalize Nature Oakland (DNO), **f** a local coalition of psychedelic activists (some of whom are pictured **t** above) **\$** Effective immediately, it decriminalizes cultivation, use and



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“We succeeded because our message is very hard to argue against when presented with scientific evidence,” said Carlos Plazola, DNO co-founder. “We showed that entheogenic plants and fungi define our relationship to the natural world, and they have very strong healing effects on our consciousness and minds.”

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DNO detailed in its resolution and at Tuesday’s public hearing the potential for these substances to treat mental health and substance use disorders, and their well-established spiritual and cultural traditions globally.

The City Council added an amendment to the language urging people with PTSD or major depression to seek a doctor’s help first before using psychedelic substances.

“Our resolution and mission focuses on education and the power of choice,” said Amber E. Senter, a DNO activist and executive director of cannabis advocacy group Supernova Women. “We are dedicated to empowering our community to make an informed and educated decision on how we chose to heal and access these different tools.”



“The psychedelic community is very strong in Oakland,” she told *Filter*, “and includes longtime practitioners, trained and traditional facilitators, doctors, nurses, therapists, scientists, researchers and community activists. The resolution was crafted based on the insight and advice of many of these people through a process of community consensus.”

At the hearing, DNO advocates and other supporters presented testimony to the Committee on their personal experiences with using



helping protect the indigenous Huichol nation of Mexico and their spiritual use of the peyote cactus, also provided testimony.

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About 100 people packed into the hearing to support the resolution. No organized opposition was presented to the Committee. The Public Safety Committee of the Oakland City Council had previously voted, on May 28, to advance the resolution to a full council vote.

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DNO’s resolution also details how Oakland will expand on this reform by lobbying its State Assembly representatives and senators to introduce similar legislation decriminalizing these psychedelics throughout California. The city must also pressure the Alameda County district attorney to stop prosecution of cases related to these substances.

DNO co-founder Carlos Plazola told *Filter* that his campaign has already met with the city’s state representatives to discuss the policy. “Our Assembly Members Rob Bonta and Buffy Wicks, and State Senator Nancy Skinner, have shown interest in the legislation,” he said, “but they wanted to see a vote in a large and diverse city like Oakland in their district before they sponsor similar statewide legislation. After the successful vote, we will now urge them to introduce this through the regular legislative process—all without having to raise the \$10-20 million needed for a statewide ballot measure.”



The Oakland initiative is separate from the California Psilocybin Decriminalization and Research Initiative—an ongoing statewide ballot measure which focuses only on psilocybin mushrooms and related compounds.

Ballot measures, rather than legislative channels, have often been the key mechanism for drug policy reform in the past decade. In



2016—passed by popular vote in a general election. And Denver’s

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decriminalization of psilocybin mushrooms **was also achieved** through a popular vote.

Plazola said ballot initiatives are a solution when a provision cannot gain any support from elected officials through the regular process, but his organization was confident the City Council would support the reform. In crafting the campaign strategy, he drew from his previous experience as an aide to Ignacio De La Fuente, Oakland City Council member for District 5. Decriminalize Nature Oakland also drew direct inspiration from the decades of policy reform on marijuana and California, and in Oakland specifically.

Plazola said that marijuana decriminalization and legalization helped prove that drug policy reforms will not have apocalyptic consequences for society, and helped build the political will to address other drugs.

With the resolution's passage, Oakland psychedelic advocates now turn to a far more complex task: educating the public on the safe use of these substances. Plazola said that his organization has created a list of 30 different community groups and institutions they are partnering with to share educational resources. DNO is also mentoring and consulting activists in other cities looking to replicate their success; advocates in Los Angeles, San Diego, Berkley, Seattle, Detroit and even Mexico have already contacted them.

“Many communities of color, especially indigenous populations, have been using natural plant medicines for thousands of years,” Senter said. “And urban communities of color have been using these medicines underground. So with proper education and information

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# Photo courtesy of Decriminalize Nature Oakland

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Alexander Lekhtman

Alexander is *Filter's* staff writer. He writes about the movement to end the War on Drugs. He grew up in New Jersey and swears it's actually alright. He's also a musician hoping to change the world through the power of ledger lines and legislation. Alexander was previously *Filter's* editorial fellow.



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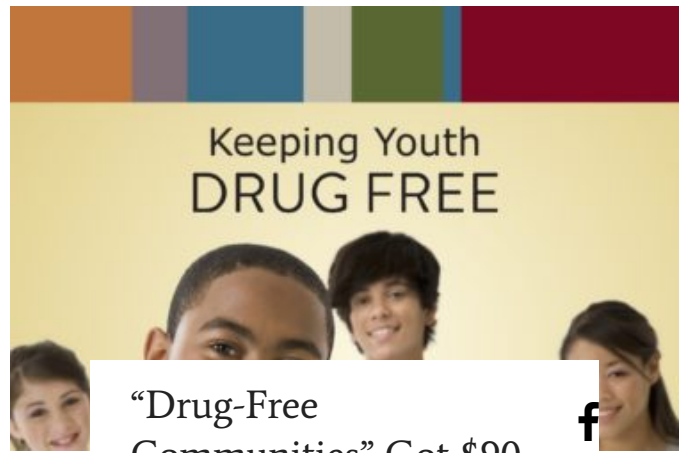
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