



Decriminalize Nature DC  
2448 Massachusetts Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
phone 202 733 4640  
email [info@DecrimNatureDC.org](mailto:info@DecrimNatureDC.org)  
twitter/instagram @DecrimNatureDC

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**CONTACT:** Seth Rosenberg

Ph: 202-790-2144 [Press@DecrimNatureDC.org](mailto:Press@DecrimNatureDC.org)

## DC Ballot Initiative to Decriminalize Entheogens Gains Unanimous Approval from DC Board of Elections

*Special Hearing on February 18 to Format Short Title of the Proposed Legislation*

**WASHINGTON, DC** - On Tuesday, February 18 at 11:30 am the DC Board of Elections is expected to formalize the short title and summary statement that voters will see on election day this November as part of a voter initiative to make entheogenic plants and fungi “among the lowest law enforcement priorities.” The Campaign to Decriminalize Nature DC (DNDC) intends to collect signatures of at least 5% of DC’s registered voters to place the initiative on the ballot.

At a packed hearing on February 5, 2020, DNDC gained unanimous approval from the DC Board of Elections to move forward. The Board of Elections found that the initiative was a proper subject for ballot proposal, paving the way for DNDC to petition registered voters to put the issue before voters in November. Passing the initiative will make entheogenic substances, including psilocybin containing mushrooms, mescaline bearing cacti and other medicinal, sacred and ceremonial plant medicines among the lowest law enforcement priorities within the District of Columbia.

Several supporters of the ballot initiative gave testimony before the Board of Elections, including initiative proposer Melissa Lavasani, Marine Corps veteran Wyly Gray, Stanley Cup winner Daniel Carcillo, and Dr. Matthew Fogg who spoke on behalf of retired Maj. Neill Franklin and the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). Joseph Sandler, general counsel for the Campaign, also appeared before the Board of Elections to argue that the proposed language comports with DC law. DNDC would like to thank everyone who gave testimony before the Board of Elections as well as those who attended in support of the initiative.

Melissa Lavasani, a mother of two and a budget officer for the DC Government, told the Board of Elections how entheogenic plants and fungi helped her recover from treatment-resistant postpartum depression and led her to propose this ballot initiative. She explained, “My life has transformed. I not only feel like myself again, I feel a hyper awareness of myself. I am calmer and more compassionate, and I feel empowered to take on whatever challenge is in front of me. I feel empowered to sit here today and tell my story in public. I am now completely engaged in my life and I am connected with my family again.”

Marine veteran Wyly Gray of Veterans of War also gave testimony on the benefits of entheogenic plants and fungi, and told the Board of Elections, “It wasn’t until I experienced the healing connection offered through plant medicine that I found any measure of true healing.”

Jesse Gould of the Heroic Hearts Project shared how transformative and healing plant medicines such as ayahuasca can be for veterans battling PTSD, addiction, and depression. He said, “Each of the veterans in

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*A copy of our report is filed with the Director of Campaign Finance of the District of Columbia Board of Elections.*

our program served this country under the principals of duty and honor. Each one of these veterans also came to my foundation out of desperation. These men and women were all seeking to regain their lives. Psychedelic therapy saved these lives.”

Daniel Carcillo, a hockey player and two-time winner of the NHL Stanley Cup, testified that entheogenic plants and fungi were key to helping him battle depression from a traumatic brain injury. He told the Board of Elections, “The mushrooms gave me a chance to forgive myself, break destructive thought patterns, and my guide taught me how to integrate the lessons from ceremony into my everyday life. It has allowed me to make a deeper connection in my relationships with my wife, parents and brothers, to be a more patient, understanding, and loving father with my children.”

Dr. Matthew Fogg, former chief inspector U.S. Marshal, gave testimony on behalf of retired Maj. Neill Franklin and LEAP. He told the Board of Elections, “Drugs are classified arbitrarily and not based on science. Many prescription drugs are not regulated enough, while plant medicines are controlled by illegal markets that can make their use more dangerous. In a time of rampant opioid overdoses, police and veteran suicides caused by PTSD, and an unaddressed mental health crisis in this country, no one should go to jail for using a natural substance to try to heal themselves.”

Dr. Mikhail Kogan, Medical Director of the George Washington University Center for Integrative Medicine, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Associate in Palliative Care as well as Geriatrics and Integrative Medicine, submitted written testimony. He wrote, “Terminally ill patients are more likely to get aggressive pain and symptom management, hospice is widely available, and patients have more choices about treatment at the end of life. Yet, despite these advances, little has emerged to address nonphysical suffering. This is why it is so important to support the Entheogenic Plant and Fungus Policy Act and put it on the DC ballot this November.”

Although the current numbers of arrests and convictions for natural plant medicines and fungi are unknown in the District, the Campaign welcomes this first step towards ensuring that DC residents using entheogens, including for therapeutic and sacred use, will not be targeted as a law enforcement priority.

“The Campaign’s message of education, including the safe use of medicinal and sacred plants and fungi, is finding an increasingly receptive audience across all levels of society as more and more people are seeking help for themselves or loved ones,” says Lavasani.

The DC Board of Elections is expected to finalize the petition in early March 2020, following a ten day challenge period. DNDC expects to have the petitions in hand by early spring and to begin collecting the more than 25,000 signatures needed. Voters will have the opportunity to set their own community standards, and make entheogens the lowest law enforcement priority in the District of Columbia.

The Campaign to Decriminalize Nature DC is a local chapter of the national movement to Decriminalize Nature, which began in Oakland, California in early 2019. The ballot initiative is organized by Washington DC residents to spearhead education and reform around entheogenic plants and fungi in the nation’s capital.

Visit [www.DecrimNatureDC.org](http://www.DecrimNatureDC.org) to read the voter initiative and learn more about the Campaign.

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