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The Campaign to Decriminalize Nature DC Postpones Adoption of Circulating Petition Citing Public Safety

Petition Circulation Put on Hold Due To COVID-19 Concerns Until at Least April 1, 2020

Washington, DC - Today at the March meeting of the DC Board of Elections, the Campaign to Decriminalize Nature DC (DNDC) postponed the adoption of the official circulating petition for Ballot Initiative 81, The Entheogenic Plant and Fungi Act of 2020, until April 1, 2020. DNDC made this decision after COVID-19 led Mayor Bowser to declare a state of emergency in Washington, DC. The DC Board of Elections was supportive of the decision and voted 2 to 0 to delay issuance until April 1, 2020 as requested by DNDC.

Ballot Initiative 81 would give DC residents the opportunity to reduce enforcement of current laws related to the use, possession, or cultivation of entheogenic plants and fungi to the lowest level priority for the Metropolitan Police Department. The initiative also calls upon the Attorney General for the District of Columbia and the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia to cease the prosecution of DC residents who have been arrested for entheogenic plants and fungi.

Enthusiasm for the proposed legislation continues to grow as public awareness of the benefits of entheogenic plants and fungi increases. Thanks to encouraging research from Johns Hopkins, New York University, Imperial College of London and, most recently, Emory University there is a significant and growing body of research showing tremendous potential for entheogenic therapies in the treatment of PTSD, major depressive disorders, addiction, anxiety disorders, and end of life therapy.

Melissa Lavasani, a mother of two and the proposer of the initiative, was motivated by the relief she found in entheogenic therapies from crushing, treatment-resistant postpartum depression. This ballot initiative would bring real help to regular people, like Melissa, without fear of prosecution. Melissa explained, "It has taken so much work by so many to achieve this level of success and momentum, it is frustrating to pause like this, but the campaign leadership agrees, there just isn't any responsible way to collect 35,000 signatures right now, and we call upon the DC Council to pass emergency legislation to authorize online petitioning or extending time to circulate petitions for the November ballot."

Currently, the Council of the District of Columbia has not introduced nor passed legislation that would authorize online petitioning. DNDC has decided to create an [on-line petition](#) for DC voters to fill out to

show their support of Decriminalizing Nature in lieu of the circulating petitions, however this on-line petition cannot be used for ballot access purposes.

To place Initiative 81 before voters this November, DNDC must collect about 25,000 valid signatures of DC voters, including at least 5% of the registered voters in 5 of the 8 Wards of the District of Columbia, by Monday, July 6, 2020. DNDC intends to collect upwards of 30,000 valid signatures to provide a safe harbor surplus. “We have trained over 50 petition circulators from all 8 Wards of DC,” says Nikolas Schiller, the Field Director for DNDC. “Petitioners are the backbone of our campaign so we can’t send them into the field until it is safe and we have more information on COVID-19 in Washington, DC.”

“The combination of public fear, lack of testing, and an expanding shutdown of 2020 election activities has made it obvious this isn’t the time to be knocking on doors and engaging DC voters.” says campaign spokesman Seth Rosenberg. Adding, “Now is the time for our campaigners to focus on themselves and their families’ well-being.”

On April 1, 2020, the DC Board of Elections will hold their next regularly scheduled monthly meeting. Depending on the status of COVID-19 in Washington, DC, DNDC plans on adopting the circulating petition at this meeting.

The online petition for Initiative 81 can be signed at: www.DecrimNatureDC.org/Sign/

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