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DA Anderson Announces New Program for Class B Marijuana Possession Arrests

Non-violent first-time offenders will have a chance to avoid a criminal conviction and to stay out of the criminal justice system.

District Attorney Devon Anderson revealed today that her office, in cooperation with the Harris County Sheriff's Office and the Houston Police Department, will give non-violent first-time offenders a chance to avoid a criminal conviction through the office's new program called "First Chance Intervention Program".



Under the pilot program, first-time offenders with no prior criminal history who possess up to 2 ounces of marijuana, which is a Class B misdemeanor, will be offered a chance to avoid being charged as long as they successfully complete eight hours of community service or complete an eight-hour class. Otherwise, they could face the maximum penalty for a Class B misdemeanor, which is up to 180 days in jail and up to a \$2,000 fine. Harris County Pre-Trial Services will monitor participants and supervise the program. The program will take effect on Monday, October 6th.

"In 2013, the office processed more than 43,000 Class B misdemeanor cases. The majority of the cases were possession of marijuana. All of those individuals were booked and processed in jail before their case was resolved," said DA Devon Anderson. "This new program will help thousands of non-violent first-time offenders avoid jail time and prosecution which can have a damaging effect on an individual's ability to obtain employment, housing and much more."

"This program is not an endorsement for the use of marijuana. However, it gives first-time non-violent offenders who are caught with a small amount of marijuana a chance to stay out of the criminal justice system by choosing to participate in the program and learn from their mistake," said DA Anderson.

For more information on the First Chance Intervention Program, go to the DA website: harriscountyda.com.

First Chance Intervention Program Fact Sheet:

- A Harris County District Attorney's Office program (in cooperation with the Houston Police Department and the Harris County Sheriff's Office)
- The pilot program applies to non-violent first-time offenders who possess up to 2-ounces of marijuana, which is a Class B misdemeanor offense
- Individuals who are detained by the Houston Police Department or Harris County Sheriff's Office will be taken to a substation to confirm their identity and to be fingerprinted and then will be offered the First Chance Intervention Program
- Individuals arrested by other law enforcement agencies for possession of up to 2 ounces of marijuana will be offered the program in court
- Depending on a short evaluation, individuals will either have to complete eight hours of community service or an eight-hour class and the program will either last 60 days or 90 days
- Individuals will have to follow all laws while in the program
- Pre-trial services will supervise the program
- Individuals can opt out of program within 10 days
- Individuals who opt out or get kicked out will have a warrant issued for their arrest