Can a family car improve the quality of life for the family? Vehicles For Change (VfC), a program that puts a car within reach of any family that needs one, makes the claim that ownership of a car can, and often does, make a critical difference. VfC has data that make their case.

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**The average family of three costs the state $9,648 in temporary cash assistance and food stamps each year, using Carroll County as a model.**

VfC, serving Baltimore City and Prince George’s and Carroll counties, is modeled after Cars for Careers, created by

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**ABELL SALUTES:**

Vehicles For Change, Inc.: The Family Car as a Vehicle for Improving Family Life

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**Needed: A Sane Approach to the Enforcement of Marijuana Laws**

Communities across Maryland are working to control drug use and associated crime. However, as they do so, they need to make clearheaded assessments of their policing and enforcement efforts. As this Abell Report shows, communities should not reflexively assume that tough marijuana enforcement contributes to their efforts to reduce substance abuse.

In the recently published “Assessing the Crackdown on Marijuana in Maryland,” Peter Reuter, with co-authors Paul Hirschfield and Curt Davies, examines the records of arrests and incarceration for marijuana possession 1991 to 1998, using state arrest data and more detailed information from Baltimore City, Montgomery County, and Prince George’s County. In addition, they explore marijuana enforcement as an adjunct of other policing activity and the use of drug treatment as a sanction for marijuana possession.

What the authors find in the data is a clear picture of increased arrests and time spent in jail. What they could not find from police interviews and “ride-alongs” is any clear indication of why these increases have occurred.

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**Upsurge in Arrests**

Marijuana enforcement has intensified in Maryland in recent years, as it has in most of the United States. Arrests for marijuana possession in Maryland more than doubled, from 6,262 in 1992 to 13,501 in 1997.

The brunt of increased enforcement has been borne disproportionately by juveniles (those under 18 years of age) and by blacks.

- While the number of possession arrests almost doubled for individuals age 18 to 44, it increased six fold for those under age 18 (Table 1). By 1997 marijuana possession was the third most common arrest offense for adolescents.

- The arrest rate for whites increased from 135 to 219 per 100,000 (62% increase). During the same period, the arrest rate for blacks increased from 122 to 413 per 100,000 (239% increase).

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*continued on page 2*
Reuter et al. point out that although rates of marijuana use in the overall population have remained stable over the past decade, there has been a decline in the rate of adult use and an increase in adolescent use. In three Maryland jurisdictions for which data are available, there was a doubling of marijuana use by adolescents between 1992 and 1998. While this undoubtedly contributes to the increase in juvenile arrests for possession, especially given that adolescents are more vulnerable to arrest, it is not sufficient to explain a sixfold increase in adolescent arrests.

Similarly, an increase in marijuana use rates among blacks may contribute to their increased arrest rate, but it cannot explain most of the observed racial disparity. Although the authors did not have access to data on the rates of marijuana use among blacks in Maryland, national data indicate a substantial increase in use by blacks. In 1992, a national survey estimated that 3.9 percent of blacks age

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**TABLE 1**

Marijuana Possession Arrests in Maryland, 1980-1997, by Age and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>18-44</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Any Other Drug</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>9199</td>
<td>3203</td>
<td>5930</td>
<td>3398</td>
<td>5775</td>
<td>2108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>7206</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>7140</td>
<td>3665</td>
<td>5230</td>
<td>4397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6489</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>5800</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>8132</td>
<td>11512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5661</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>5094</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>4225</td>
<td>12029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>6262</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>5502</td>
<td>1543</td>
<td>4693</td>
<td>12850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>7200</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>5934</td>
<td>2141</td>
<td>5032</td>
<td>14674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9250</td>
<td>2253</td>
<td>6787</td>
<td>3351</td>
<td>5848</td>
<td>13947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>11661</td>
<td>3251</td>
<td>8207</td>
<td>4523</td>
<td>7068</td>
<td>15265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>12508</td>
<td>3968</td>
<td>8282</td>
<td>4935</td>
<td>7514</td>
<td>11797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>13501</td>
<td>3843</td>
<td>9353</td>
<td>5775</td>
<td>7667</td>
<td>12655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2**

Marijuana Possession Arrests Rates in Maryland, 1980-1997, by Age and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Over 12</th>
<th>12-17</th>
<th>18-44</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Any Other Drug</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued on page 3
13 and over had used marijuana in the past month. By 1998, that estimate had risen to 6.6 percent. However, that increase, if applied to Maryland, would account for only half of the rise in the ratio of black/white arrests between 1992 and 1997.

The critical point, according to Reuter et al., is that there has been an extraordinary increase in arrest rates for marijuana possession among juveniles and blacks during the 1990s. This increase cannot be accounted for solely (or even primarily) by changes in marijuana use by these groups. By 1997, a male adolescent marijuana user faced a ten percent probability of arrest in the course of a year. For black adolescents, the probability was even higher.

**Incarceration**

Although most people arrested for marijuana possession avoid incarceration, a significant number do spend some time in jail. Reuter et al. did not have access to sufficient data to track the outcome of all arrests. Since juvenile records are not available to the public, the authors could analyze only the outcome of adult marijuana arrests in 1998-99.

Most adults who spent time in jail due to their arrest for marijuana possession did so before their case actually went to trial. In August 2000, only 38 individuals were serving state prison sentences (where they might serve more than one year) for which a conviction for marijuana possession was the most serious offense. (In many other cases, possession was one of a number of offenses.)

However, among male arrestees whose most serious charge is possession of marijuana or possession with the intent to distribute (PWID), the data indicate that between 23 and 29 percent did spend at least one night in jail – a result of pre-trial detention (Table 3). A substantial portion spent more than ten days in jail.

The data for each of the three jurisdictions show that black arrestees were more likely to be subject to pre-trial commitment than were white arrestees, though the difference was modest in Montgomery County. And in each jurisdiction, blacks who spent time in pre-trial

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**TABLE 3**

Jail Time for a Sample of Male Adult Marijuana Possession and Possession with Intent to Distribute (PWID) Arrests by County and Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Baltimore City</th>
<th>Montgomery County</th>
<th>Prince George’s County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 days</td>
<td>248 40</td>
<td>147 142</td>
<td>279 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>75% 90%</td>
<td>71% 80%</td>
<td>69% 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10 days</td>
<td>4% 5%</td>
<td>7% 7%</td>
<td>8% 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-50 days</td>
<td>10% 5%</td>
<td>10% 6%</td>
<td>3% 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50 days</td>
<td>5% 0%</td>
<td>3% 2%</td>
<td>6% 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8 1</td>
<td>6 4</td>
<td>9 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Mean*</td>
<td>6 1</td>
<td>5 3</td>
<td>5 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest</td>
<td>241 36</td>
<td>71 200</td>
<td>273 110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean calculated with all those serving more than 50 days being put at exactly 50 days

Source: Authors’ analysis of Courtlink data

It should be noted that Table 3 presents data from the Courtlink sample of all males for whom marijuana possession, including possession with the intent to distribute (PWID), was the most serious charge, usually the only charge. Though PWID is a more serious charge legally, analysis of data on amounts from Prince George’s County suggested that such arrests were often indistinguishable from simple possession charges. In addition, neither the individual offender’s criminal record nor his current criminal justice status at time arrest is taken into account.
commitment spent more time in jail than did whites. However, the racial disparity in incarceration was not as pronounced as it was in overall arrests. In addition, the authors issued a caveat about the data, which did not reveal prior criminal histories which might reasonably affect decisions about pre-trial release.

Using the data available, it is possible to make very rough estimates of the total jail time for possession of marijuana in Maryland. In 1997, about 10,000 adults were arrested in Maryland for possession. Approximately one-third spent some time in jail prior to their trial. After eliminating the statistical outliers (those whose long jail time may be a function of some other charge), the authors estimate that each arrestee held in pre-trial detention spent an average of about seven days in jail.

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Drug Treatment

Many individuals arrested for marijuana possession, both adults and juveniles, avoid incarceration but are admitted to drug treatment programs. In Maryland, the number of marijuana admissions to drug treatment programs rose from 2,718 in 1992 (one-eighth as many as for cocaine or heroin) to 7,245 in 1998 (two-fifths as many as for cocaine or heroin).

Particularly striking is the rise in youthful admissions for marijuana. Between 1992 and 1998, marijuana admissions for individuals under age 18 rose more than sixfold. In 1992, juveniles constituted less than 20 percent of those admitted with marijuana as the primary drug of abuse; by 1998, they constituted almost half of such admissions. The share of marijuana admissions represented by blacks rose modestly over the period, from one-third in 1992 to two-fifths in 1998.

Those individuals admitted to drug treatment programs for marijuana abuse stay in treatment as long as those admitted for other drug abuse, about four months. They are also just as likely to be admitted for residential treatment as those admitted for other drugs.

One might postulate that the increase in adolescent admissions to drug treatment programs simply reflects a corresponding increase in marijuana abuse and dependency. However, this explanation is problematic. It assumes a need for treatment, which appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Marijuana creates a dependence in about ten percent of those who try it, though generally that dependence is of modest duration and severity. In fact, most adolescents who use marijuana quit...
of their own volition without either arrest or demonstrable harm. Thus, it is unlikely that the increase in admissions reflects an actual need for drug treatment for marijuana users of any age. In fact, on this point, the authors found that changes in the arrest rates between 1992 and 1996 accounted for much more of the variation across counties in treatment admissions than did the prevalence of marijuana use.

The significant point is that many individuals arrested for marijuana possession, especially adolescents, find themselves in drug treatment programs as a result of their arrest. This raises the question of whether or not these individuals are receiving services that are useful to them. That is, do they need drug treatment? Or, rather, is referral to a treatment program being used as a mechanism by which young arrestees without prior criminal records can avoid more serious sanctions?

Conclusions

In the late 1990s, Maryland experienced an upsurge in the arrest rates for possession of marijuana, especially among adolescents and blacks. Arrests for marijuana possession in Maryland more than doubled, from 6,262 in 1992 to 13,501 in 1997. Although adolescent use of marijuana increased substantially, as did use by blacks, the increase was not sufficient to explain the large increase in arrest rates for either group.

For many marijuana users, their arrest was followed by some period of pre-trial detention in the local jail. Reviewing data on the adult population, we see that about one-third of adults arrested spent at least one day in jail. Perhaps as many as one-sixth spent a week or more. If arrested, blacks were more likely to be held in pre-trial detention; when held, blacks were likely to spend more time in jail than whites. However, this racial dispar-

continued from page 4

WHY?
Marijuana arrests increased markedly in the late 1990s. Do we know why?

To start with, Reuter says, we can eliminate some possible explanations for the increase. It was not caused by a declared police campaign against marijuana use or a major change in the law. It was not related to an overall increase in marijuana use, because use has been stable over the past decade. It was probably not a result of a change in community attitudes, because national survey data indicate no growing public panic about marijuana.

Reuter and his co-authors provide only suggestive information on possible causes. Based primarily on police interviews and “ride-alongs” in Baltimore City, Montgomery County, and Prince George’s County, they speculate that the reasons for the increase in marijuana arrests may include the following:

- The increase in arrests may have occurred as an adjunct of changes in overall policing practices. These include “zero tolerance” and “quality of life” policing that prompt police officers to respond to even small infractions, thereby bringing the officers into more frequent contact with the public. The large number of marijuana arrests which are incidental to traffic violations and disorderly conduct supports this hypothesis.

- Marijuana arrests may be an outcome of generic drug enforcement activity. Police officers target specific places and people for drug enforcement activity. Shifts in behavior of drug market participants may be resulting in more marijuana arrests. Also, focus by police on drug “hot spots,” all of which were identified in minority neighborhoods, may help to explain the racial disparity observed in marijuana arrests.

- Marijuana arrests may be the result of increased focus by senior police management on marijuana. Some of the rise in arrests may reflect the decision of management to encourage officers to give increased priority to marijuana arrests.

- The upsurge in arrests may be caused, in part, by a change in demographics of the user population. Although overall use has been stable, use rates are up for adolescents, who are more vulnerable to detection and arrest.

continued on page 6
eligibility will have been convicted of sim-
year disbarment. Most of those who lose
motion; a second conviction leads to a three-
visions that disbar an applicant for one
1998 Higher Education Act includes pro-
policy for those convicted of drug of fenses.
national trend toward a more punitive pol-
time, and/or criminal record. This increase
harm by their arrest, conviction, jail
these individuals may be permanently
schooling and employment prospects for
the contrary is more likely to be true: the
Maryland are likely to realize any benefit
als arrested for marijuana possession in
about individual outcomes, Reuter’s study prompts
our interest, are we pleased with the outcomes of
we suggest, to provide assistance to individuals
third arrest on both the individuals involved and
more arrests, more jail time, more use of
marijuana enforcement – the policing,
while unreasonable to ask whether or not the pub-
Community and the involved individuals, it is
reasonable to ask whether or not the public
will is being carried out by the upsurge
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