



505 Fifth Ave. Suite 901, Des Moines, Iowa 50309
www.aclu-ia.org

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Contacts:

Veronica Fowler, ACLU of Iowa communications director

Tess Borden, ACLU National and Human Rights Watch

Iowa Ranks Among Worst States for Racial Disparities in Drug Possession Rates

Iowa has the second-worst rate of racial disparities in arrests for drug possessions in the country, a national ACLU/Human Rights Watch report released today has found.

A Black person in Iowa is about 7 times more likely to be arrested for drug possession than a white person in the state, even though studies show that the two races use illicit drugs at roughly the same rates.

Only Montana had a wider racial disparity. (See chart below from page 46 of the report.) Nationally, Black people are nearly 11 times more likely than white people to be arrested for drug possession.

Second Report to Rank Iowa Among the Worst

This most recent study expands on the findings of an earlier ACLU report that examined only marijuana possession, in which Iowa ranked the worst in the country in terms of racial disparities, with a Black person in Iowa being 8 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person. [Click here for details.](#)

The report released today, *Every 25 Seconds: The Human Toll of Criminalizing Drug Use in the United States*, looked at illicit drugs in general, including cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines and prescription drugs used for non-medical purposes (see page 30-33 of the report for detail).

The report, based on FBI and other government data, documents the devastating harms of criminalizing personal drug possession in the U.S.

Iowa Stands Out Also for Impact on Voting Rights of Black People

Iowa also stood out in the report because of the impact that felony-level drug possession can have on a person's voting rights. Iowa is one of only three states that automatically and permanently takes away a person's right to vote after a felony conviction. The only way to get that right to vote back is through an arduous process overseen by the Iowa governor's office.

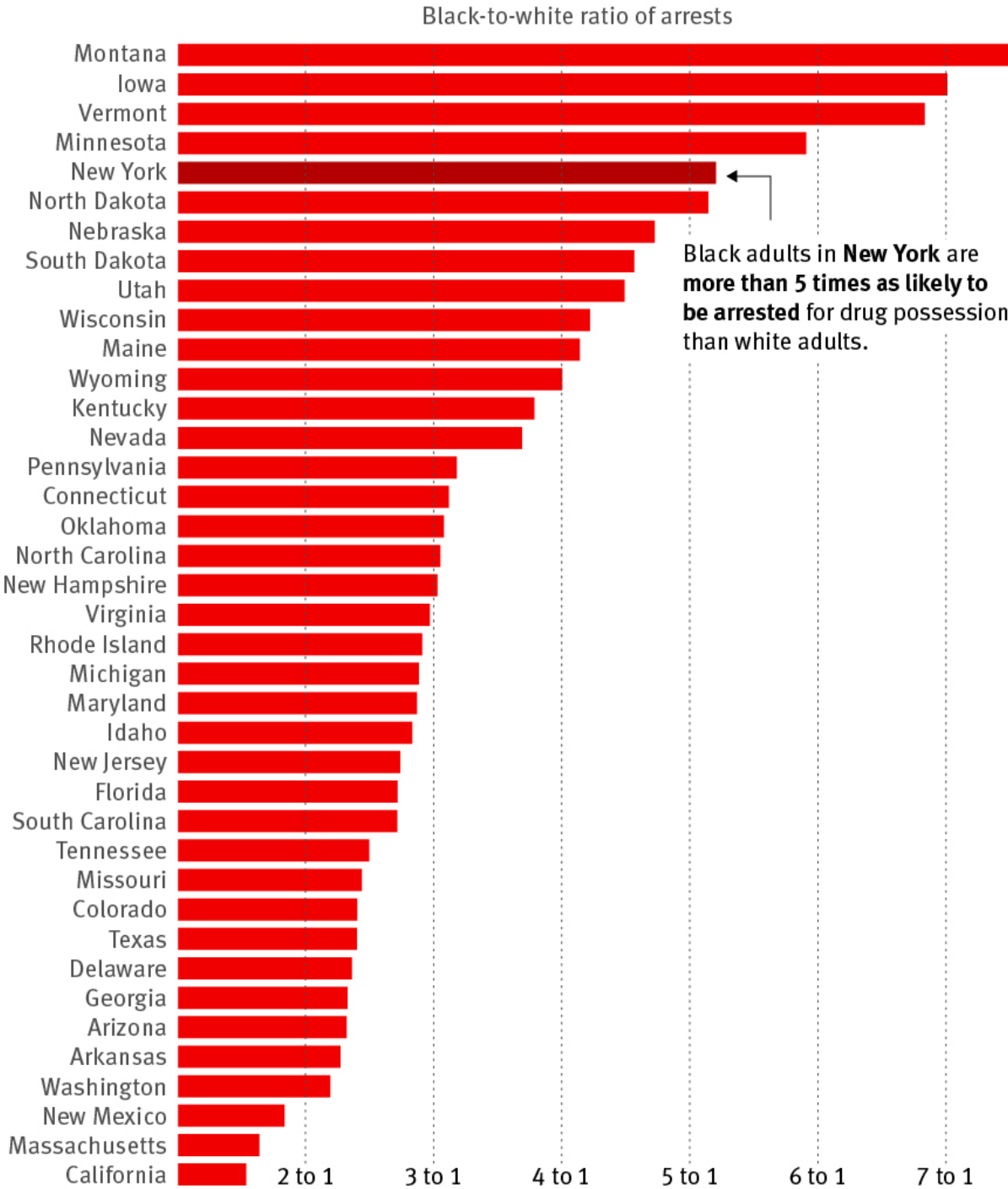
"This report underscores the need for Iowa policymakers to act with urgency to address the crisis in racial disparities that exists in our criminal justice system and which creates political outcasts of our citizens, especially Black people, through lifetime

felony disenfranchisement from voting rights," said Rita Bettis, ACLU Legal Director. "We urge lawmakers to work to reform drug sentences, act to decriminalize possession for personal use, and end felony disenfranchisement in our state."

Drug charges, of course, can have other consequences, including separating families; excluding people from job opportunities, welfare assistance, public housing, and voting; and exposing them to discrimination and stigma for a lifetime. While more people are arrested for simple drug possession in the U.S. than for any other crime, mainstream discussions of criminal justice reform rarely question whether drug use should be criminalized at all.

[The full report can be viewed here.](#)

Black adults are arrested for drug possession at higher rates than white adults in every state for which there is sufficient police data.



SOURCE: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH ANALYSIS OF US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, FBI, UCR PROGRAM, 2014.

The ACLU of Iowa is a private, non-partisan organization that fights to advance civil liberties for all. It is the state affiliate of the national American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU prides itself in upholding everyone's civil liberties, no matter who they are or what they believe. We work to assure the rights of all Iowans – from atheists to devout Christians, from labor unions to businesspeople and more – to make sure the constitutional rights of all are preserved. For more information, please go to www.aclu-ia.org.

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