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New Paltz officials dig into marijuana arrest figures

by [Terence P. Ward](#) / November 3, 2017 / 3 comments



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After speakers leveled accusations that there are far too many marijuana arrests in New Paltz at a recent town board meeting, and some of them appear racially motivated, town supervisor Neil Bettez came to the joint town-village board meeting last week armed with data.

“We were told 17% of the town’s population has been arrested for non-violent marijuana offenses,” he said, and that certain populations are being targeted. He and deputy mayor KT Tobin tried to find out if these allegations are true.

Tobin said that the analysis was done mindful of the wider backdrop of the “systemic racism in the justice system, which is empirically provable.” While the marijuana usage rates are close across racial categories, African-Americans are arrested at rates two to five times as frequently as white Americans.

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While data obtained from the courts — which Tobin said overall were more useful than arrest records because there are other police forces patrolling New Paltz streets — were not broken down by race, they were able to identify some trends. About 40% of these arrests are by town officers, with 24% coming from university police and 31% from state troopers.

The so-called “two-strike policy” on campus paints a chilling picture of what happens with these relatively low-level offenses. Deputy supervisor Daniel Torres verified that after just two arrests for possession, a student is expelled. That’s arrests, not convictions, meaning that even if local justices think it’s not a big deal, a young person who is careless twice gets their college years cut short.

University policy is among the toughest in the SUNY system, but it’s not bolstered by a recent report produced at the Benjamin Center which lays out evidence that marijuana being a “gateway drug” is a myth, and may in fact reduce use of opioids.

Torres noted that cases originating with university officers often indicated odor as the probable cause; whether any marijuana was found on those defendants was not clear from the records, he said.

Beyond issues unique to college students, village board member Don Kerr didn’t think the high dismissal rate in town courts — 97% — was cause for celebration. Being arrested “carries with it a lot of costs,” he said, such as potential loss of reputa-

tion and even employment. “I’m an example of that,” he said, referencing a 2011 incident in which he was arrested for accepting delivery of a package containing eight pounds of the illicit greens. The case against him was dismissed, but before that he resigned as president of the school board.

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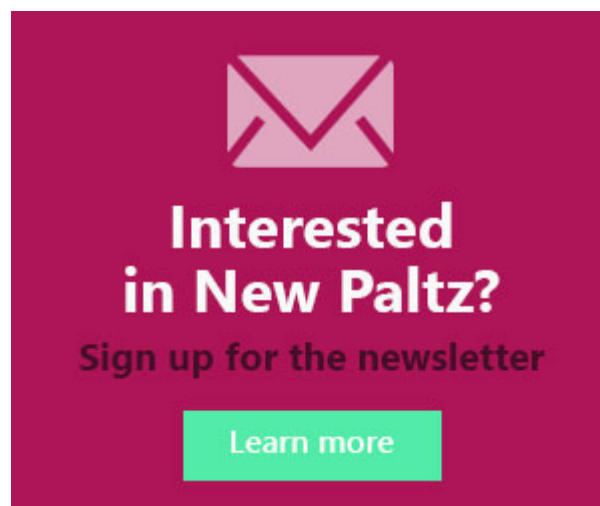


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Johnny Spinoza November 4, 2017 at 4:25 am

In a police state, there is always a need for secret-police. It don't take a think tank to figure out who the armed-enforcers on campus are working for. Even Treblinka had its clowns.



Capt. Trips November 4, 2017 at 11:26 am

The article omits the university chief won recognition a year ago for most dope busts. There was a grinning photo sitting at the desk with a thumbs up in his hand. Could have been an L S D flashback too.



Straight Arrow November 4, 2017 at 4:28 pm

Before the village trustees resignation as president of the school board, he was first promoted from vice press to president following his second NY state bust. Three times he was busted for weed, not two or one times.

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