

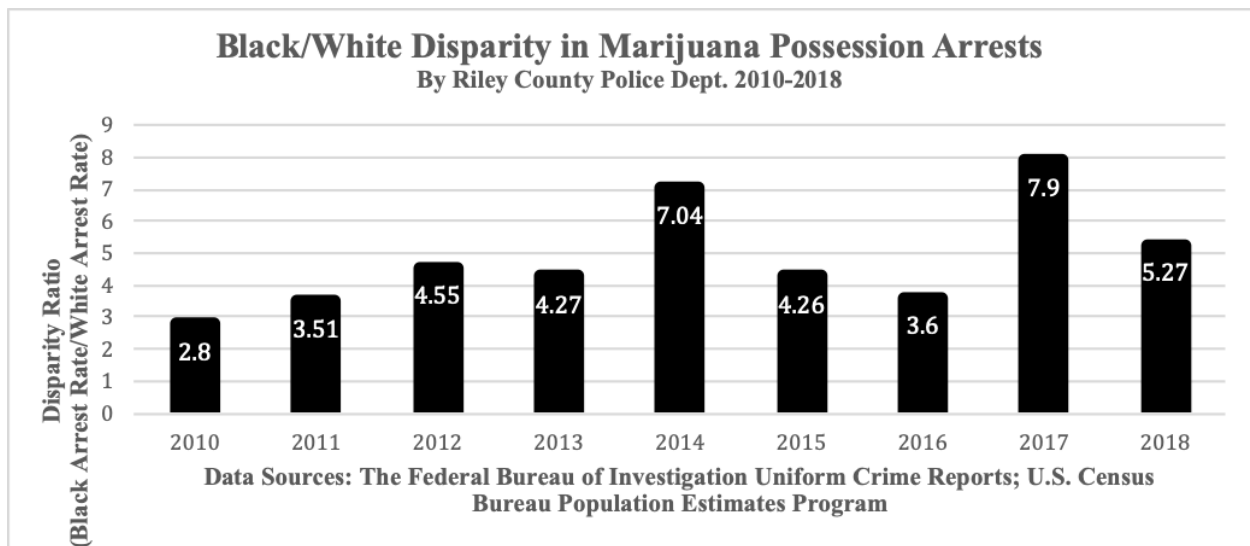
## MANHATTAN-RILEY COUNTY COALITION FOR EQUAL JUSTICE

*In the U.S. black people use marijuana at roughly the same rate as white people, according to survey research covering the years 2001-2010.\**

***Why then in Riley County is a black person 4.7 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person?***

The Manhattan-Riley County Coalition for Equal Justice are local citizens concerned that racial bias may be influencing the enforcement of drug laws in Riley County. With the help of a Kansas State University researcher, the Coalition has investigated the Riley County Police Department's official arrests reports, submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice from 2010-2018\*.

Here is what we have found.



**Between 2010 and 2018** the number of RCPD arrests for possession of marijuana clearly fell disproportionately on African Americans. In that nine-year period, the *average rate of black persons arrested for possession of marijuana in Riley County was 4.7 times greater than the rate of arrests for white persons, nearly 8 times greater in 2017, and more than 5 times greater in 2018.*

We believe our findings offer strong evidence that **Riley County Police Department officers are treating black persons more harshly than white persons** in their decisions about who to arrest for possession of this illegal drug. **We want to know why.** Does it stem from department policies, training, and institutional priorities? Or does the arrest disparity expose a conscious or unconscious racial bias and discrimination by individual RCPD officers?

**This is a serious matter.** Currently in Kansas a person found guilty of a misdemeanor marijuana first possession offense is punishable with a **fine of up to \$2500 and one year in jail.** Even with a light fine and no jail time, the consequences can be lasting and severe, as many employers reject job applicants with any drug conviction on their record.

**The racial disparities we have uncovered are not unique to Riley County.** A comprehensive study of all fifty states found that in 2010 the racial inequality in arrest rates for marijuana possession was **3.7 to 1 across the country** – and in **Kansas 4.4 to 1.**\*\* It seems likely, therefore, that this racially unequal treatment by police in our community reflects a **widespread anti-black stereotype in American society**, associating African Americans with drug addiction and criminal behavior.

We strongly urge the RCPD to determine what biases, practices, or policies are causing the racially unequal treatment our research has uncovered. We urge that the RCPD then carry out the **reforms needed to eliminate the unequal arrest rates that we have found in our city and county.**

### **Coalition for Equal Justice Committee Members**

Rev. Jonalu Johnstone, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Manhattan  
Rev. Caela Simmons Wood, Minister, First United Congregational Church of Christ, Manhattan KS  
Dr. Lorenza Lockett, Assistant Professor of Social Work, Kansas State University  
Dr. John Exdell  
Maureen Sheahan  
Pastor Carl Taylor, Mt. Zion Worship Center  
Alayna Colburn  
Kevin Bryant

### **Other Individuals Supporting the Manhattan-Riley County Coalition for Equal Justice**

Muenfua Lewis, President of K-State Black Student Union, 2016-17  
Justice Davis, President of K-State Black Student Union, 2015-16  
Bryon Williams, K-State Admissions, Diversity Recruitment, Community Outreach, 2012- Aug. 2017  
Shaun Dowdell, President, 2015, K-State American Ethnic Studies Student Association, 2015-16  
Rev. Benjamin Hitzfeld, First Christian Church, Manhattan KS  
Rev. Patrick Funston, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Manhattan KS  
Edith Guffey, Conference Minister, KS-OK Conference of the United Church of Christ  
Rev. Christian Watkins, Campus Pastor, K-State Ecumenical Christian Ministries

\* We are very grateful to William Chernoff for his research on Riley County racial inequalities in marijuana arrests. Dr. Chernoff has a Ph.D. from the K-State Department of Sociology, and is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Southeastern Louisiana State University. The Department of Justice Uniform Crime Reports is the source of data on white and black annual marijuana arrests. The Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program was the source for determining the number of white and black residents in Riley County. -- \*\* American Civil Liberties Union, "The War on Marijuana in Black and White", p. 48.

**Manhattan-Riley County Coalition for Equal Justice**  
**[equaljusticercks@gmail.com](mailto:equaljusticercks@gmail.com)**

**Manhattan Alliance for Peace and Justice,**  
**Jonalu Johnstone, Chair -- [jonalu@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jonalu@sbcglobal.net)**