

Transforming Psychedelic Policy: Our Summer as MAPS Legal Interns

ANDREW GARGANO & CALEB THOMAS



Andrew Gargano



Caleb Thomas

THIS PAST SUMMER, WE WERE granted the opportunity to spend ten weeks as Legal Interns for the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) after our first years at Georgetown and New York University Law Schools, respectively. We were excited to work in the psychedelic field; MAPS is not an organization that most young law students stumble into accidentally when looking for a summer job.

As we expected, the work was very interesting. What we did not expect was the immediate responsibility we received to create high-level advocacy documents and legal resources, how closely we were able to work with federal decision-makers, and the truly encouraging progress being made towards psychedelic drug law reform and greater acceptance of psychedelics in medicine and culture.

Our first assignments were to create educational fact sheets for governmental representatives on the potential of marijuana and ibogaine to address the opioid crisis, and on the use of medicinal marijuana and MDMA to treat posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We collaborated extensively within the Policy and Advocacy department at MAPS, brainstorming the best ways to persuasively communicate to elected representatives the potential and safety of psychedelics. In addition to the fact sheets, we drafted a comment for the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis presenting scientific research and a cost/benefit analysis of research into ibogaine therapy to break addiction, even locating a source of federal funds that could be diverted towards medical ibogaine research. We also made significant headway on a legal toolkit for people interested in psychedelic law. The toolkit provides an overview of the state of psychedelic law and psychedelic liability, and offers paths forward for criminal defendants, spiritual groups, psychedelic therapists, medical professionals, and harm reduction organizations such as DanceSafe.

In addition to creating these documents and resources, we gained a deeper understanding of the processes of reform via the federal government by writing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to release information about their failure to end the NIDA marijuana cultivation monopoly, currently being upheld by the Justice Department. We spoke with staffers for Senator Elizabeth Warren, and drafted a letter to support the congressional inquiry she filed on behalf of Professor Lyle Craker and his application for a DEA marijuana growing license, which, along with at least 20 other applicants, the DEA has ignored. We also had conversations with leaders within the Drug Policy Alliance, the Ayahuasca Defense Fund, the CATO Institute, and the Institute for Justice (among others) to network and organize for future efforts in legal, policy, and cultural reform. We also spent time watching webinars on topics covering both local and international contexts of psychedelic use and the war on drugs.

Throughout the summer, we received oversight and encouragement from Natalie Ginsberg and Ismail Ali of MAPS, who made sure we met as many people in this exciting field as would take our calls. It was inspiring to meet so many intelligent, kind, capable, and eclectic people, and encouraging to see them representing psychedelics and working for reform in drug policy. Our internship experience reinforced something for us that is already well understood by those in the psychedelic community: that the potential mental, emotional, spiritual, and even physical benefits that psychedelics can offer are as diverse as the people that use them. With so many wonderful people involved in pushing for this movement of reform, we are hopeful that it is only

a matter of time before the stigma associated with psychedelics erodes, and in turn produces a domino effect of progress. With the upcoming Phase 3 MDMA and psilocybin studies, and growing legal and cultural acceptance of marijuana, perhaps the dominoes are already starting to fall. It is an exciting time to join the MAPS team, and we look forward to seeing what the future holds for psychedelic law and policy.

IN OUR OWN WORDS

Andrew: Working for MAPS this summer has been an extraordinary experience. A large part of the work Caleb and I did this summer was to dive deeply into the legal history and framework surrounding psychedelics. One of the main highlights for me was the extensive research I conducted as part of a memo to help resolve some frequently asked questions about free speech and harm reduction issues when discussing psychedelics and providing harm reduction information. Not only was the work highly intriguing, but I also know the research and results I was able to compile will be valuable to MAPS, the drug reform movement, and the public at large as well.

In addition to the discrete work projects I was involved in over the summer, I also had the opportunity to attend the release of the World Drug Report at the United Nations headquarters in New York. From the progressive Portuguese ambassador, to the United Nation's staunch advocacy for widespread decriminalization, to the Philippine envoy's call for greater criminalization, it was enlightening to hear different perspectives from the international community. And it was also a great opportunity to connect with leaders from other non-governmental organizations working to promote harm reduction and drug reform.

I also had the opportunity to lobby with Natalie on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. We spent time talking to Senate staffers in order to build connections and gain greater support for ending the DEA-enforced NIDA monopoly on cannabis research permits.

I'll be walking away from my experience this summer with some valuable new skills and knowledge that will surely help me in the future, along with some great new friends and allies in the movement to end the drug war. I hope to continue working closely with MAPS and all of the other organizations and individuals we were introduced to this summer as I return to campus at Georgetown Law this fall and begin a new semester leading my school's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy .

Caleb: I would like to begin by thanking MAPS for the opportunity to work in psychedelic law my first summer of law school and by thanking Ismail and Natalie for their help and support; I hope the work I did this summer turns out to be as valuable to others as it was for me.

One of the personal benefits of working for MAPS this summer was that it gave me a clear opportunity to discuss my interest in psychedelics with my family. I was unsure how they would react. At first, my parents were surprised and a bit concerned. But as the summer progressed and as I kept them

informed on what we were working on, they came to embrace the idea that psychedelics present huge potential benefits for our society and, if used carefully, fewer risks than many have been led to believe.

Our work regarding ibogaine, marijuana, and the opioid epidemic was particularly interesting to me and those around me. I come from central Pennsylvania, an area that has been hit hard by opioid addiction. My family has seen a cousin die, an uncle lose his arm to injection-point infection, and an aunt lose custody of her kids just in the past few years because they were unable to treat their addiction. After showing them the research on the potential of psychedelics treatments and alternatives, even my grandparents (not to be ageist) opened up to the idea that psychedelics can actually help people and that the war on drugs has been misguided and unjust. It was wonderful to be able to "come out," so to speak, as a psychedelic user and advocate and be able to alleviate the concerns of my largely conservative family by showing them the real-world uses and benefits of psychedelics.

Change is derivative of acceptance, acceptance derivative of understanding, understanding derivative of empathy, and empathy blocked by all the calcified residue of ego that can be blasted away by the thoughtful use of psychedelics. MAPS' work has the potential to lead to significant changes in the world far beyond drug policy reform alone. Sincere communication can truly make a difference, and MAPS provided me an opportunity and a platform for discussion with my own family and friends regarding psychedelics and drug law reform. I hope and believe that MAPS can be as successful on a nationwide scale in creating a more open, progressive, and nuanced view of psychedelics and their use. 🌱

Andrew Gargano, MAPS Policy & Advocacy Legal Intern, is a second-year law student at Georgetown University Law Center. Prior to entering law school, he worked in the communications field at a liberty-advancing non-profit chamber of commerce. He graduated from the University of South Florida in 2011, where he pursued an interdisciplinary course of study in anthropology, international relations, and foreign languages.

Caleb Thomas, MAPS Policy & Advocacy Legal Intern. After receiving his B.A. in Economics and English from Washington & Jefferson College, Caleb pursued a legal education at New York University School of Law where he is currently a second-year student and an editor for the Journal of Law and Liberty, which focuses on Classical Liberalism. His interest in the potential benefits of psychedelics and the legal and cultural obstacles in their way led to a desire to work with MAPS as part of the organization's first generation of legal interns. He grew up in an area heavily impacted by opioid abuse — drug use of all types was denigrated. Against this background, Caleb is interested in the expression of psychedelic experience, particularly through writing, to provide more nuance to characterizations of what drug use is and what drug use does. He enjoys playing and watching sports, writing fiction, and getting out into nature.