

Class of 2028 Application:
Program in Political Philosophy, Policy, and the Law

*Applications to join the PPL class of 2028 are due **Monday, March 9 by 11:59 PM***

The PPL Application comprises three elements:

1. This form, including a personal statement and a brief admission essay
2. A writing sample that shows your analytical and argumentative abilities, e.g. an essay from a class in a PPL-relevant discipline
3. A copy of your transcript (unofficial is OK)

These materials must be submitted to PPLProgram@virginia.edu by Monday, March 9 at 11:59PM.

If you have questions about the application, please email the Director, Justin Snedegar, at PPLProgram@virginia.edu.

PPL Application Form 2026

Contact Details

NAME:

YEAR:

EMAIL:

HOME ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER:

Application Information

CURRENT GPA:

NAME AND EMAIL OF A REFERENCE WHO CAN SPEAK TO YOUR ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PPL PROGRAM:

Admission Question

Pasted below, after this form, is Charles Fain Lehman's op-ed, "Rescheduling Marijuana is an Enormous Mistake". In 300 words or less, please comment below on his argument, explaining whether (and why) you think we should agree or disagree with his conclusions. In your view, what are the main strengths and weaknesses of his position?

Personal Statement

Please comment below on your reasons for applying to the PPL program, your academic interests, and any other information relevant to your application (400 words maximum).

***Submit this form, along with your writing sample and transcript,
to PPLProgram@virginia.edu.***

Rescheduling Marijuana is an Enormous Mistake

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2025/12/trump-marijuana-rescheduling-tax/685317/>

Charles Fain Lehman, December 18, 2025

President Donald Trump signed an executive order today that committed the Justice Department to “rescheduling” marijuana. Although the order won’t legalize pot, it will relax a series of restrictions that the federal government has long enforced. The move has a broad coalition of supporters, including many progressives, who say that it will enable medical research and alleviate mass incarceration. But in reality, rescheduling marijuana will do little more than hand a tax break to the corporations that spent millions of dollars lobbying for it.

The term *rescheduling* comes from the Controlled Substances Act, the legal foundation of America’s drug-control regime. Under the CSA, controlled drugs (as opposed to uncontrolled ones, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen) are sorted into five schedules. For decades, the government has listed marijuana under Schedule I, which it reserves for drugs that have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. If the administration’s plan goes through, marijuana will shift to Schedule III, a classification for drugs that have a medical use and a relatively low potential for abuse or dependence.

Such a move would clearly defy the current science on marijuana. Contrary to conventional wisdom, pot—especially today’s highly potent product—is both addictive and harmful. Figures vary, but the CDC estimates that about 30 percent of users become addicted. Moreover, research has linked marijuana use to a range of health risks. Recent meta-analyses have found strong and persistent associations between marijuana use and heart disease, stroke, lung disease, loss of IQ, psychotic events, and schizophrenia. Overdosing on marijuana may be all but impossible, but the drug is no less risky than mescaline and certain psychoactive components of khat, both of which the government classifies under Schedule I.

What about marijuana’s medical applications? Forty states already permit doctors to recommend marijuana, and many Americans use it for a variety of issues, including insomnia and chronic pain. But scientific research simply doesn’t back up the claim that marijuana is medicine. A recent paper published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* looked at more than 30 systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and concluded that “evidence from randomized clinical trials does not support the use of cannabis or cannabinoids for most conditions for which it is promoted.” Some marijuana patients may find relief because of a placebo effect or temporary intoxication. But the assertion that the cannabis plant can treat underlying pathologies is, at best, premature.

Trump and others at today’s signing ceremony claimed that rescheduling marijuana will facilitate greater research, which may well show that pot has genuine medical uses. But even though Schedule III substances are generally easier to study than Schedule I

substances, reclassifying marijuana won't make researching it much easier. This is because a law that Congress passed in 2022 to ease marijuana research already supersedes the restrictions imposed by the drug's schedule status, as the Congressional Research Service observed last year. If marijuana is rescheduled, Congress would need to modify or repeal that law to actually make researchers' lives easier—a heavier political lift. Alternatively, the administration could use its ample statutory power to facilitate marijuana research without rescheduling the drug.

Some may expect that rescheduling marijuana will help keep its users out of prison. Indeed, Schedule III drugs are generally subject to lighter penalties than are Schedule I drugs. But as the Congressional Research Service has noted, many of the penalties for marijuana offenses apply regardless of its schedule status, so reclassification won't soften pot-related laws, which result in few prison sentences anyway.

If rescheduling won't make research easier or keep people out of prison, why do it at all? One answer: money. Marijuana giants such as Trulieve, whose CEO has enjoyed significant access to the White House, stand to make billions from rescheduling thanks to an obscure provision of the tax code, 26 USC 280E. According to that clause, businesses cannot deduct from their taxes any expense accrued from trafficking a controlled substance. That's why some state-legal marijuana conglomerates pay effective tax rates of up to 70 percent. Importantly, though, 280E applies only to Schedule I and II substances. Move pot to Schedule III, and that tax burden vanishes. (This may explain why the administration didn't move marijuana to Schedule II even though it has repeatedly acknowledged that pot is dangerous.) In other words, an industry worth an estimated \$34 billion is about to get an enormous tax cut.

Marijuana companies have spent big to get to this point. They poured at least \$1 million into Trump's inauguration, paid for a \$1-million-a-plate dinner with the president, and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to get MAGA influencers to advocate for rescheduling. Trump, a teetotaler whose brother suffered from addiction, has expressed plenty of skepticism about pot. But industry executives seem to have persuaded him: Some of them were reportedly on a call with the president when he said that he would move forward with rescheduling.

Today's executive order will empower an often-predatory industry that sells addictive and hazardous products to millions of Americans. Business is already booming: As of 2022, some 18 million Americans use marijuana daily or almost daily, and about 19 million have a "cannabis use disorder," according to federal survey data. In addition to the previously mentioned health harms, these users are also at risk of social isolation, disconnection, and family struggles, as Annie Lowrey documented in *The Atlantic* in 2018.

Rescheduling will not lead to meaningfully more research, more healing, or more Americans avoiding prison. But it will likely lead to more people living with a dangerous habit. And it will certainly lead to more money for a massive industry. Big Marijuana is about to get even bigger.