

# Drugs on the Docket Podcast

## Season 1 Episode 4 – *United States v. Angelos*, federal mandatory minimums, and sentencing reform with Weldon Angelos and Paul Cassell

### TRANSCRIPT:

**Hannah Miller:** The War on Drugs resulted in some lengthy sentences for first time nonviolent drug offenders. And Weldon Angelos of Salt Lake City, Utah, received one of the harshest. In 2004, Federal District Court Judge Paul Cassell was forced to sentence Weldon to 55 years in prison for selling marijuana while in possession of a firearm. Though Weldon was convicted of merely possessing firearms, federal statutes required Judge Cassell to condemn Weldon to more than half a century behind bars in a federal prison. According to a report published last year by the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center, virtually all of those sentenced to life and defacto life sentences in the federal system for drug offenses were subject to a mandatory minimum sentence, and often a mandatory minimum life sentence. But following record high numbers of life sentences in the 1990 and 2000, the last decade has seen the number and rate of life and defacto life sentences imposed for drug offenses decline significantly. And while Weldon's story has a kind of happy ending, he was released early in 2016 after a federal court granted him a reduction in sentence, there are countless others like him still serving lengthy sentences for low level, nonviolent drug offenses.

Very rarely do we get a peek behind the curtain to hear a defendant and a presiding judge discuss the particulars of a charge, conviction and sentencing outcome. But for today's episode, we did just that by bringing Weldon and Paul together to reflect on Weldon's case, the laws that forced Paul's hand, and the work they've done since to meaningfully impact criminal justice reform.

From the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center at The Ohio State University. This is Drugs on the Docket. Each episode will tell the story of how U.S. court decisions impact drug law and policy and continue to shape the War on Drugs. I'm your host, Hannah Miller. Today, we're discussing federal mandatory minimums. If you like what you hear in today's episode, visit [go.osu.edu/drugsonthedocket](http://go.osu.edu/drugsonthedocket) to follow the series.

For this episode, the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center has recruited a very special co-host from the Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Professor Erik Luna. At the college, Erik teaches and writes primarily in the areas of criminal law and criminal procedure. Thank you so much for joining me today, Erik. Why don't you get things started by introducing our guests?

**Erik Luna:** Great. Thank you, Hannah. It's a pleasure to be here today. And a little bit of a participant observer issue because I've had the opportunity to interact with them on a variety of topics. So it's more of an ongoing conversation with our special guests. So let me introduce them without further ado. Our first guest is Weldon Angelos. Weldon, in 2004 was sentenced to a mandatory 55-year prison term for low level marijuana offenses. Thanks to efforts by families and friends and a variety of supporters, his cause was picked up and championed by a variety of politicians from both sides of the aisle, by celebrities, by philanthropists, by leading news organizations like The Washington Post and Rolling Stone. And he was eventually released from prison and his sentence was fully pardoned in the past few years. Since since that time, he has embarked on a remarkable career in criminal justice reform and advocacy. Weldon, thank you for being here today.

**Weldon Angelos:** Thanks for having me.

**Erik Luna:** Our second guest is Paul Cassell. Paul Cassell is a former U.S. District Court Judge in Utah who presided over a Weldon's case and was required to hand down a 55-year prison term. Prior to being a U.S. District Judge, Professor Cassell was a distinguished scholar at the University of Utah, S.J. Quinney College of Law, among the leading voices in favor of both some oftentimes difficult, tough sentences, in favor of victim's rights, in favor of law enforcement prerogatives and in crime reduction. He was faced with Weldon's case within a few years of taking the bench and issued a remarkable opinion. Since leaving the bench, he has returned to the faculty at the S.J. Quinney

College of Law and continues his remarkable advocacy in a variety of areas, including victim's rights. Paul, great to have you on board.

**Paul Cassell:** Great to be here, Erik.

**Hannah Miller:** Weldon, could you walk us through your case, particularly the facts that led to your 55-year sentence?

**Weldon Angelos:** Yeah, absolutely. So as a young a young teenager and a young adult, I was working on a career in the music industry. I had a once in a lifetime opportunity to work with legends like Snoop Dogg and Tupac Shakur's Recording Group, among many others. However, my music ventures weren't stabilized at the time, and so while I was waiting for this opportunity to really grow, I started selling small amounts of cannabis on the side to help pay the bills until some of these deals went through and it became financially stable.

And eventually I was approached by a confidential informant, an individual I had known probably when I was 14 years old. He was sent to prison for cocaine trafficking, and he got out and caught another charge in 2002. I think it was armed meth trafficking. And he decided to try to work off his charges and some of the local authorities suggested that he approach me to try to purchase some cannabis from me. And so he did approach me and I agreed to provide roughly \$300 worth of cannabis on three occasions. After those three transactions, I ceased communication with the informant. The music business was doing really good. I got a record deal working with Snoop and others, and so things started stabilizing. I stopped talking to the informant. He repeatedly called me and requested guns and meth and coke, and I continued to say no.

And in November of that year, I was raided and arrested for trafficking cannabis as well as having a firearm during the marijuana transaction. And so initially, I was facing a five-year mandatory minimum with a, I believe, a year and some change on the cannabis. And shortly after that, plea negotiations were underway and the government wanted a sixteen year plea offer. And to me at the time, I felt that was just ridiculous for one charge of selling \$300 worth of cannabis and possessing a firearm in connection with that offense. And I've never been in the criminal justice system prior to that, so I didn't understand the federal system. I had had friends growing up who had interactions with the state system. Neighbors of mine went to state prison for murder and got out after five or eight years. And so to me, I couldn't fully accept that what they were telling me was was true. And so I didn't accept the plea offer. And went to trial. And unfortunately, I lost on 16 of those counts, won on a few of them. And I was facing actually 105 years of mandatory minimums at trial. We were able to win two of the 924 Cs to get that down to a 55 year mandatory minimum.

**Hannah Miller:** Were you aware that sixteen years was maybe a pretty good offer, considering what you could have been facing had you gone to trial?

**Weldon Angelos:** My attorney said that they were being completely unfair in their offer because the informant and his co-defendants also had three 924 Cs, but they were all violent felons, admitted gang members and were selling methamphetamines, and they all got offered a five year plea offer to one 924 C count. And so my attorney thought that they were putting pressure on me in the hopes that I would agree to roll on entertainers like Snoop Dogg. And so in my mind, that made sense because of the difference in time. And so I just couldn't accept a sixteen year sentence either. Not having been in the criminal justice system before, I didn't think that it was a possibility. I thought the 55 years was just a threat to scare me and that somebody, whether it would be Judge Cassell or appellate court, would look at this and throw it out eventually. But soon I realized that was a reality. And the federal system is pretty unjust.

**Hannah Miller:** Paul, you were the federal judge that presided over this case. And so can you tell us, how did you view this case and walk us through what your conclusion was? You had a personal kind of conclusion, but there was also the statutory-led conclusion that you that you had to make. Can you recall that for us?

**Paul Cassell:** Sure. I got this case just like any other case that I got. And as the presiding judge, it was my job to call balls and strikes, as has been famously said in describing the judicial role. So case kind of trundled along and got sent for trial and I arranged to have it go to trial for a week with the prosecutor and defense attorney. It happened right along the lines of what Weldon describes. The government had a strong case that he was a low-level marijuana dealer, but for a couple of those deals he had had in his possession a firearm. So he was convicted not only of the drug counts, but also the firearms counts. The case was pretty much like any other case until I started getting the sentencing information.

And what the sentencing information showed was that for those three counts of carrying a firearm in connection with a drug trafficking deal, Weldon was looking at five years and then 25 years and then 25 years. Those were under section 924 C of federal law. And they all say stacked, was the phrase that was used at the time. So you stack that up and basically Weldon, within the course of a week or two of a few small marijuana deals, had ended up racking up 55 years of mandatory prison time. And that just didn't seem right to me. So I held a couple of hearings on it before I imposed the sentence. I brought the prosecutor in and said, you know, are you serious? Basically, are you really asking for a 55 year sentence? It turned out that they were serious, that basically it was kind of a train wreck situation. Weldon describes it accurately. What was happening was the government was saying, hey, look, we're going to send you to prison for 105 years or 55 years so you better take our plea deal of 16 years. And Weldon and his attorney were they were saying, look, that's totally unfair.

And so you kind of had this situation where the government had to carry through with its threat, even though that was totally unreasonable. There wasn't much for me to do. I had to impose the 55-year sentence. I thought that was a totally unjust sentence. I didn't have any choice under the law. So I decided really all I could do was impose that sentence kicking and screaming. And so I wrote a 50 page opinion saying how unjust it was and and generally tried to make as big a fuss as I could to attract attention to what was happening.

**Hannah Miller:** If I could, Erik, ask a follow up question of Paul.

**Erik Luna:** Of course.

**Hannah Miller:** We've heard of police discretion, judicial discretion, but it sounds like there's also some prosecutorial discretion in terms of what charges are brought against someone. And so it really sounds like as a judge, you were hinting like, are you sure you want to bring these charges? Does it does it go both ways where prosecutors are being maybe a little lenient or prosecutors are being maybe a bit too aggressive and at the time, was there anything specific about that time that it made sense that they were being particularly aggressive in Weldon's case?

**Paul Cassell:** Yeah. So let's talk for just a second to set the background for some of the listeners here about the way federal sentencing works. Let's take a normal case. I don't know, a bank robbery or something like that. If somebody is convicted, there is a range of possible outcomes. 0 to 25 years is the way it works for bank robbery. And then layered on top of that, you have sentencing guidelines. So the guidelines might say, well, you know, if a bank robber had used a gun or hit somebody or different things like that you get a few points up or down, then you might have seven or ten years for that for the bank robbery. What's happened very unusually, though, on top of those restrictions, is that mandatory minimum sentences have been imposed. And so for carrying a firearm in connection with drug trafficking deal, that's where you can get these five years and 25 years that add up on top of that.

So you might say, well, okay, but prosecutors, we've got a lot of smart folks in this country that are doing a good job when they're prosecutors and they're exercising prosecutorial discretion and using that discretion to bring serious charges only in cases where it needs to be brought. If somebody was hiding a nuclear bomb or was getting ready to provide firearms to terrorists or something like that, maybe, you know, a 55 year sentence is what you needed to force them to cooperate and provide information that would be helpful to law enforcement. So the law has these very heavy tools. But I think you find in a case like Weldon's case, the tools can sometimes end up being applied in situations where they weren't really intended to apply. I mean, I couldn't find anyone who thought that 55 years was the right sentence for for carrying a gun and a couple of marijuana deals. That doesn't make any sense. In fact, in my opinion, one piece of it that got a lot of attention is I was able to go through and calculate the sentencing guidelines for some other crimes. If, Weldon had been the kingpin of a major drug trafficking ring that had killed people, he would have gotten something like 20 years in prison. If he'd been a rapist he would have gotten, I don't know, 11 years in prison, maybe 13 years if he raped a child. Of course he didn't do any of those things. And he's getting 55 years. I mean, I just looked at that and said, that can't be right. That can't be the way to run a federal criminal justice system. And it's it's so out of whack that it I thought it brought the system into disrepute.

**Erik Luna:** Let me turn to Weldon on that. Weldon, you experienced this. You heard Judge Cassell's opinion in court. You read it. The opinion actually won an award for for judicial writing. And it made a really strong case for the injustice of your sentence. And as we mentioned, Judge Cassell made a pitch to the president to ultimately provide relief. You, however, he had to impose a sentence and you were sent to prison. Could you share with us a little bit of your experience having been subjected to a an effective life sentence pursuant to mandatory minimums and how that affected you and affects you to this day?

**Weldon Angelos:** Yeah, absolutely. Because of my sentence being such a long sentence, I was sent to a maximum security penitentiary in Southern California, after I was told I would probably go to a camp because I have no violence and no prior history. Yeah, I went to a maximum security and when I got there, it was a nightmare. I walked into that prison and it looked like everything you see in the movies. It was a very dangerous prison. And I could not understand why I'm in there with all these people who have done various violent offenses for some cannabis charges. But I understood, you know, obviously, the sentence put me at a security risk in their mind, and I seen people get murdered in prison. So the only thing I could do was bury myself in books, educate myself, and working to better understand how the law became this way and how I could get myself out.

Having judge Cassell's opinion is really what gave me and my family hope that this nightmare would come to an end soon enough. It was just really traumatizing seeing everything I experienced in a maximum security. Thankfully, I survived and I was ultimately moved to a medium security where things were a lot easier. My sister was one of my number one advocates and so my sister was out there screaming injustice and just trying to find anybody that would help. And we were able to build a coalition for clemency. We figured that I would probably lose all of my appeals, post-conviction motions. And so we were always looking at clemency given Judge Cassell's opinion seeking clemency. And so we started organizing, building support among members of Congress, celebrities and some of the folks that signed the amicus briefs. So when it was time to file for clemency, we had a lot of support. But one thing that got me through was that support in especially Judge Cassell's opinion.

**Erik Luna:** Judge Cassell, how did this case, how did it affect your views on mandatory minimum sentencing? As was mentioned at the introduction, you had been a prosecutor, you had been in the Justice Department. You had worked both back in D.C. and in Virginia. You had been an advocate for a variety of policies that were oriented towards the rights of victims and ensuring public safety. And you were, of course, nominated by a conservative president, George W. Bush, and confirmed by the Senate. This case and your ruling may not have been predicted by many. How did the case and then what happened afterwards, how has it impacted your thinking about sentencing or mandatory minimums? And how has the the resulting changes, how have they both politically and legally, how have they affected what you think should occur in the future?

**Paul Cassell:** Well, that's a great question and a complicated question. I think it's important to understand the root problem that came up in Weldon Angelos's case and that's the stacking feature to the 924 Cs. I think when Congress passed the law, they were concerned, as anyone would be, about drug trafficking that's connected with firearms because that can escalate to a violent situation very quickly. So they said, all right, well, let's throw some mandatory minimums at it. But I think the defect in the law and the problem in the law was the way these things stacked up. So Weldon Angelos, in the course of a very short period of time, racked up 55 years of mandatory jail time. I think what Congress had intended to do was to say, look, if somebody like Weldon has a gun at a drug deal and then goes to prison and then gets out and then doesn't learn his lesson and goes out and does the same thing again, we want to have another sentence on top of that. And then if he gets back out and does it a third time, we want to have another mandatory sentence on top of that. But here with everything stacked up so very quickly, there wasn't any opportunity for Weldon or for anyone else subject to these crimes too, to change their ways and become rehabilitated and to move on with their lives.

And so that was one of the things that I highlighted in my opinion, is the way these mandatory minimums stacked up so quickly and got completely out of whack with anything that you could describe as sensible or or normal sentencing. That was, I think, the biggest thing that needed to be changed. And I was pleased when I guess it was in late 2018, Congress did change the stacking feature of 924 Cs, so they no longer stack up. I should be be clear, I'm not completely opposed to mandatory minimum sentences, but they still need to be rational and relate to sort of ordinary sentencing.

Let me give you an example or two that I think ordinary listeners might appreciate. Suppose society says we've got a very serious problem with domestic violence and domestic abusers are never going to jail at all. And so the law says, you know, for a domestic violence offense, someone should spend a weekend in jail that would signal that society is going to take those crimes seriously. But that sentence isn't out of whack with what might ordinarily be associated with a crime like that. 55 years for carrying a gun to a couple of deals is completely out of whack. And that's where I think we had a very serious problem.

**Hannah Miller:** So Weldon, you mentioned that while you were serving your time, you built a coalition for clemency. And after serving 13 years, you were released. You had early release and then I believe it was President Trump who pardoned you. Is that correct?

**Weldon Angelos:** Yes.

**Hannah Miller:** I would love to hear about what you've been up to and the advocacy and what's on your radar right now, and especially your work on criminal justice reform, advocacy for those who remain incarcerated. I've looked at your site, I've looked at the Weldon Project.

**Weldon Angelos:** Yeah, the [weldonproject.org](http://weldonproject.org) and [projectmissiongreen.org](http://projectmissiongreen.org).

**Hannah Miller:** I also want to know, like, what role should the cannabis industry play in these areas? Because when you were sentenced, there were states where weed was illegal and now maybe not the federal system, but state systems bit by bit are moving to a place of like, you know, is weed the worst thing in the world? The attitude shift has been pretty dramatic over the last 20 years, so I'd love to hear your thoughts on just how the cannabis industry should be a part of this conversation.

**Weldon Angelos:** So when I was released in 2016, I was on a mission. I wanted to change 924 C stacking. That was my main goal. And a number of the reform bills that were introduced in Congress while I was still incarcerated, they failed. There wasn't enough conservative support. That started changing when I was released. You had Senator Mike Lee and Chuck Grassley pushing these reforms. More and more conservatives were coming on board, I think, in part due to Cassell's opinion. And so when I got out, I wanted to do whatever I could to help them get this over the finish line. And so we started working with the Trump Administration on the First Step Act and ensuring that the 924 C fix was included in that bill and ultimately it was included and passed in December of 2018, which you know, was my number one priority.

After that passed, I met a lot of people who were incarcerated for cannabis-only offenses. One individual was sentenced to 22 years for operating a state compliant cannabis dispensary in California. He followed the law to the tee but was prosecuted federally anyway. And so after the 924 C statute was fixed, I shifted my attention to cannabis. I thought it was hypocritical for these cannabis businesses all across the country to be able to violate federal law openly and not be prosecuted. But you have individuals who are still incarcerated, many of them who are in those states that have now went legal and they're still serving these decades long sentences. And so I wanted to do something on cannabis policy and also cannabis clemency. And so we brought a number of cases to President Trump of individuals that were serving life in prison for a cannabis only offense. I believe President Trump commuted the sentence of 12 of those and then a number of other other cases that we had brought to his attention.

Shortly after President Trump left office, the Biden Administration had reached out to my organization to start working on a cannabis clemency program because they wanted to focus some of their attention on these cases. And so we started working with them. Erik helped me organize this letter that we submitted to Biden that included people like Drake, Deion Sanders, had a number of elected officials from both the left and the right. And so it was a very powerful letter that we submitted in September of 2021. Shortly after that, we went to the White House to sit down and meet with Biden's top advisors. Erik went with us. We also had the former Deputy Attorney General, Jim Cole, and a number of other advocates that were we were able to go in there and sit down with the White House counsel, I believe the U.S. attorney for DC and a number of other high ranking White House officials, to sit down and talk about this issue and try to come up with a criteria that maximizes this program's chances of helping these individuals, but also protecting public safety at the same time.

And so the White House was very interested in this. Shortly after that, we met with the U.S. Pardon Attorney who was very interested in adopting this program. And with regard to your question about the cannabis industry, I 100% believe that they have a duty to help these individuals that are still incarcerated just because of the hypocrisy. Federal law does not recognize state marijuana laws. And so I believe the cannabis industry has absolutely has a duty to chip in and help out. And I think they have to some extent.

**Hannah Miller:** Weldon, you brought up public safety, and so it's a really good segue way into my next question, which is actually for Paul. A purported spike in crime has been the subject of broad public discussion, and so has this spike in crime changed or affected your thoughts on mandatory minimum sentencing? You said earlier that you were not fully opposed to mandatory minimums.

**Paul Cassell:** Yeah, well, I think the big question that all of us are worried about is how do we reduce crime? I mean, people who pass mandatory minimum sentences are trying to do the right thing in some sense. They're trying to stop crimes from occurring. But the question is, are they doing it in a cost-effective way when you consider both the expense to taxpayers are building more prisons, the cost to families and those who are incarcerated and to communities, to those people, to long prison sentences. So you have to consider all of those those factors. I think are pretty much in the mainstream on another point that I think ties right into your question. I think most people that have worked in how do we reduce crime, say it's not the severity of sentences that we give, but rather the certainty of sentences. So if we took one person and gave him a 100 year sentence for for a particular kind of crime, that's not going to be anywhere near as effective as if we could take 100 people committed to the same crime and gave them one year in prison or maybe even one month in prison, because then people would know that, gosh, if I commit this kind of crime, I'm certain to get it get punished. And so I think what we've seen in the criminal justice system, not just in the federal system, but all over the country, is a low certainty of punishment. Right now, if you commit a murder in this country, the chances that you're going to be ultimately convicted are less than 50%.

And so one of the things that I've written some law articles about recently is what I'm calling the Minneapolis Effect, that after the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, that led to a number of police officers pulling back from enforcing sort of routine law enforcement or proactive law enforcement kinds of maneuvers. And as a result of that, I think that's what caused the crime spike. You can you can go back and if you look at a lot of the data and I pulled some of that in my articles, the crime spike, the most recent one occurred right around June of 2020. And I think that was a result of police pulling back, which reduces the certainty of punishment. And so, you know, you can have as many mandatory minimums as you want after the fact, but if people aren't being apprehended and prosecuted, it doesn't make any difference what the sentences are at the end of the process.

**Hannah Miller:** You mentioned proactive policing tactics. And when you pull back from proactive policing, you may see that that spike in crime or you can at least attribute it to some extent to pulling back. Are there any other factors that you can think of that the Justice Department could play a role in terms of deterring criminal activity that isn't just letting someone commit a crime and then prosecute them accordingly?

**Paul Cassell:** Yeah, that's a great question. There obviously there are all kinds of factors that go into into crime rates that try to run an effective criminal justice system which reduces crime and prevents victimization, is again a goal that I know everyone shares. So let me be clear, I think there are a lot of different things one can do. People have talked about chasing after the root causes of crime, reducing poverty, providing employment opportunities, things like that. I certainly am fully supportive of efforts along those lines. But I think we've got to have, if you will, a full court press on crime. That part of that effort has to be an effective criminal justice system and you can commit a murder in this country and know that you have a less than 50% chance of getting apprehended for that. That's a problem. And we need to think about ways to increase those crime clearance rates. And those clearance rates are even lower if you start looking at other crimes like burglaries and so forth. I think, you know, your chances of getting convicted if you're a professional burglar out there for each burglary are well under 20%. So we need to think about ways to make law enforcement more effective, to increase the certainty of punishment. I don't really think that increasing the severity of punishment is should be our top priority. It's it's getting more people who commit crimes into the system through effective law enforcement. That should be a priority for us now.

**Erik Luna:** That's a really good point, Paul. And and if you don't mind, I'll follow up and this kind of my cap this off and then we'll turn to Weldon for his final thoughts. I'm wondering whether or not what you've just discussed isn't the basis for a kind of left right detente on some of these things. That if those who might be more in favor of criminal justice reform were more willing to accept some more rapid responses, some certainty of a consequence, while those on the maybe more on the conservative end, at least historically, or more associated with law enforcement, would be willing to, for example, allow for a reduction in the length of sentences or to allow a variety of alternatives to incarceration, given how expensive and sometimes morally destructive incarceration can be.

Is there something in there where these kind of historically pitted sides of left versus right, law enforcement versus defense or civil liberties, where that maybe not capturing everything that's going on, and instead there may be a kind of sweet spot where all people, both sides of the aisle, might be able to find some agreement that will improve the criminal justice system?

**Paul Cassell:** Yeah, I think that's an excellent point, Erik. And I think there is some possibility along those lines. I mean, one of the things, this will kind of tie and and one of the points Weldon was making, is what things should we

be prioritizing and does is cannabis enforcement a priority right now? I would submit no, it's not. If you asked me what my priority would be, my priority is violent crime. And particularly firearms crimes, because we see so many deaths that result from those crimes every year and serious injuries. And by the way, we know that those crimes have produced victims and victims that are disproportionately concentrated among residents of inner cities, racial minorities and others who are in the worst position to defend themselves against crime. So if you're thinking about what could we do to improve civil rights for traditionally disempowered communities, one of the things we could do is to improve law enforcement and provide safe and secure communities.

So I think there really is a potential for a broad-based, bipartisan policy making in that area. Now, there's going to need to obviously be discussion. People may have different approaches to driving crime rates down and exactly how they should go about it. How law enforcement should go about it. Obviously, there have been instances of law enforcement abuse that had led to distrust between law enforcement and minority communities in a number of instances. We need to address all of that. But I do think that the goal could be shared and then we could be discussing, all right, what is the best way to get to the goal? The goal is to reduce crime, particularly violent crime, and provide safe communities for everyone in our country.

**Erik Luna:** The same kind of question for Weldon. Weldon, you have worked across the aisle in your advocacy work. You've worked with lawmakers and policymakers on the left. You've worked with them on the right. And I know you've done a lot of work, obviously, in the drug policy space, and with regards to sentencing and other areas. What do you see as the future for justice reform or for the advocacy, the type of changes that are needed in criminal justice, either at the federal or state? Where do you think that the emphasis should be going forward to try to improve outcomes, to protect the weakest among us in society, to ensure that civil liberties are protected, but also to make sure that predation and crimes don't occur? Is there a space in which you, given your work, can see some important changes coming?

**Weldon Angelos:** Yeah. So I definitely think there's more work needed to be done on sentencing reform, providing some retroactivity for the First Step Act. But where I'm seeing a lot of changes, and I think there's going to be a lot more changes in the future, is with regard to cannabis policy on the federal level. State after state is continuing to change their cannabis policy. Some are legalizing recreationally, some are legalizing for medical purposes. But more and more members of Congress, particularly on the right, are starting to understand that the federal government needs to catch up with the rest of the country. And we've been working on a bill called the States Reform Act that's getting more popular. Amazon endorsed it. There's more and more Republicans in the House that are supporting it. That would essentially put states in the driver's seat on cannabis policy. It's a states rights bill that lets each state decide their future with regard to cannabis. And so I think this is an important change.

In addition to that, in the short term, I see some hope for passing SAFE Banking, which would allow legit cannabis businesses access to the banking system. There's a lot of problems that are going on, especially in California, where individuals are getting robbed because these cannabis businesses have to work in cash. And so this is another area that I think we've been seeing a lot of progress and it actually almost made it into the spending bill on Monday. So I think this is an area that we definitely need to focus on.

**Hannah Miller:** Well, with that, thank you so much, Paul and Weldon, for joining us today to discuss mandatory minimums. And thank you, Erik, for your willingness to be my co-host for this episode.

**Erik Luna:** It's my pleasure. It's always good to talk to my friends, Judge Paul and Weldon.

**Paul Cassell:** Same here. Yeah. Nice to be on with everybody.

**Weldon Angelos:** Thanks everyone.

**Hannah Miller:** Drugs on the Docket is a production of the Moritz College of Law Drug Enforcement and Policy Center. This episode is produced by me, Hannah Miller and Holly Griffin. Doug Berman is our editorial advisor. The music is composed by Joe DeWitt.