



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Testimony of Rep. Deane Rykerson in Support of LD 1380 *"An Act To Legalize, Tax and Regulate Marijuana"* May 20, 2015

Senator Rosen, Representative Fowle and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Deane Rykerson and I represent District 1 in the Maine House serving most of Kittery.

I am testifying in support of LD 1380, "An Act To Legalize, Tax and Regulate Marijuana."

In the great divide that is politics, I represent the "Libertarian" wing. Coursing through my veins is a healthy blend of liberal economics and strong civil liberties. It's the line between liberal and libertarian, and it's precisely where I believe the issue of whether to continue Prohibition, or replace it with a system of regulation and taxation, sits.

The War on Drugs has cost this country trillions of dollars, and we frankly have little to show for it. Kids are fleeing Central America with backpacks to escape the violence from drug cartels who are kidnapping, raping and murdering them. Those drug cartels are largely funded by the consequences of our own War on Drugs. This is a cycle of violence that has absolutely nothing to do with the cannabis plant, and everything to do with the policy of Prohibition.

In this committee, you're examining how to pay for the jail system, much of which is overridden with people struggling with mental illness and addiction issues. It seems backwards that we would criminalize mental health and addiction, while gutting treatment funding.

Rep. Russell's bill provides for a rational vision beyond Prohibition. We can't just end it and hope all the pieces fit back together. That's quite irrational, actually. The sponsor has really studied the experiences in other states, setting up standards for dosing and packaging, requiring third-party testing of the product and even setting up standards for concentrate extraction so that it can be done safely. Some might say she's made pot as boring as it can get.

The Department of Justice has laid out 8 clear guidelines for states regarding marijuana laws. They largely focus on preventing diversion, whether it be diverting the product to children and states where it is illegal, or whether it be diverting proceeds and profits to the drug cartels. We can probably all agree that Congress has stalemated on so many issues that we're lucky if they can name a bridge. However, real progress is being made daily to move the entire country toward an end to the failed War on Drugs.

This bill sets Maine up to prevent students from being denied access to college or job opportunities, takes the air out of the balloon regarding the racial disparity of the application of the law, and sets us on a trajectory toward responsible regulation. The fact that the bill uses tax revenue to build schools instead of prisons is just an added bonus. I recently attended a National Conference of State Legislatures workshop in Denver Colorado and I saw marijuana legalization first hand. Although there are some tuneups needed, I saw a healthy, safe system that generates good revenue that has very little visible opposition.

There will be people who suggest that it is irresponsible to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana for adult use. While I respectfully disagree with that assertion, the real issue is that the vast majority of people disagree with it. We have a chance to get ahead of this issue, provide a thoughtful, deliberative approach to ending Prohibition, and still leave the question of whether to legalize or not up to the people of Maine. The vote is coming, and as of next year, our hands will be tied.

It is no coincidence that this bill has so many lawmakers submitting testimony. We all see the writing on the wall, and I urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1380.