



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of:
LD 88: An Act to Provide Qualifying Municipalities a Percentage of Adult Use Cannabis Sales and Excise
Tax Revenues**

Joint Standing Committee on Taxation
State House, Room 127
Thursday, March 9, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

MPHA is in support of LD 88: "An Act to Provide Qualifying Municipalities a Percentage of Adult Use Cannabis Sales and Excise Tax Revenues." This bill establishes the Local Government Cannabis Revenue Fund, which would receive funds from cannabis sales and excise taxes. Funding would then be distributed to municipalities that have "opted-in" to adult use cannabis sales, in proportion to the ratio of revenues generated in the municipality.

We support this legislation because we continue to be concerned about increases in access to cannabis – through home delivery and off-premises sales, for example – without concurrent investments in enforcement, public health education, and public safety efforts. This bill helps to address those concerns by providing funding to municipalities that have opted into adult-use cannabis sales.

In Maine, past 30-day cannabis use among youth is increasing. The rate was 22.1% in 2019, which is an increase of 2.7% since 2017 (19.3%). Perhaps most concerning is that the youth use rate is higher than adults': past 30-day use of cannabis is 19.1% (2020) among adults, with a disproportionately higher use rate among 18-24-year-olds (31.4%). For a point of reference, in 2013, the adult use rate was 8%. This increase in use mirrors an increase in negative public health consequences: In 2020, there were 5,625 cannabis-related emergency department visits, representing a 21% increase from 2019.¹ Rates were disproportionately higher for males and for people ages 18 to 25 years old. Furthermore, the number of poison center calls in Maine related to exposure of cannabis products among those 5 years old and younger increased from 2 calls in 2016 to 39 calls in 2022. **In other words, in just six years, there was a 20-fold increase in poison center calls.**

Unlike alcohol, there is currently no equivalent responsible server training for cannabis. This gap increases the likelihood that these products could be sold to youth and to adults at high risk for misuse. Likewise, perceptions of cannabis access are also changing. Findings from the Maine State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) show that after a decline from 57% to 52% (2011 to 2017), the rate of high school students who report it would be easy to get cannabis is starting to increase again (53%). With increasing social acceptance, we see decreases in the perception of harm among high school students. Compared to the perception of harm from binge drinking, daily drinking, and any prescription drug misuse, which have remained stable, perceptions of harm related to using cannabis one to two times per week have decreased from 2009 to 2019 from 42% to 33% among high school students.² The 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey asked, “How much do you think people risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways) if they smoke cannabis once or twice a week?” 38% of middle schoolers and 67% of high schoolers answered, “Slight risk” or “No risk,” an increase for both groups in no perceived risk compared to 2015 and 2017.¹

In the context of this bill, we are hopeful this funding will help municipalities that have opted in protect public health and safety and ensure retailer compliance with state laws. We respectfully request you please vote LD 88 “Ought to Pass.” Thank you for considering our testimony.

¹ Maine State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW). [Cannabis Use Dashboard](#).

² Maine State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW). Update for Prevention Advisory Board: Key findings of the 2020 state profile.