

Senator Hickman and members of the VLA Committee,

My name is Edward Phipps. I am a registered Medical Cannabis Caregiver, a member of the Maine Craft Cannabis Association, and a Shaper Participant of the Seed2Health Learning Alliance. I am submitting my testimony today in support of LD 1819.

There has been much debate as of late regarding the viability of Maine's Medical Cannabis Program. Despite this, I believe there are two undeniably positive facts that reflect the success of the program. The first, is that it has offered a foundation for legal cannabis in the state. It has offered an opportunity to business owners, patients, politicians, and regulators to experience and learn about cannabis on all levels. The second is that it has undeniably provided high quality cannabis in an accessible way to a wide variety of patients that find comfort and relief in medical cannabis in ways that no other industry or products can offer.

The debate about the Medical Program largely relates to how it should or should not be regulated. It is a healthy debate that deserves perspective from all sides. The problem with these debates is not whether any one person's perspective is right or wrong. It is the lack of access to accurate and transparent data upon which all good decision making should be rendered. Especially, when thousands of people's livelihood, health, and freedom are at stake.

This is why I testify in support of LD 1819. This opportunity will allow the collection and objective analysis of data surrounding cannabis we all sorely want, and the program is persistently lacking. Some would say the Medical Program is flawed. This could be said about any cannabis program. The Medical Program does not need to be fixed. It needs to evolve. With clear and shared understanding. To accomplish in an intelligent way that works, we all need more research and more data so that we have a firm ground to stand on when discussing daily practices as well as regulatory advancement.

There is an understandable concern regarding the adverse effect of industry favorable bias in this Commission as proposed. However, there is always bias in all scientific research. No one perspective can offer accurate unbiased data. This is why science not only embraces but requires research from many perspectives.

Can we improve on this structure as proposed? I believe through the productive conversation a work session offers we can. Common denominators, cross referencing and challenging different groups perspectives is how we balance bias with fact. This Commission will not only offer the much-needed perspective from those with hands on experience in the field, but also by definition offer a diversity of perspectives given the difference in required backgrounds from each member. That experience alone is data. Waiting to be collected and used in a productive and science-based way. This Commission may be just one step forward for the collection of data, but it is an imperative one.

Sincerely,

Edward Phipps