

Testimony Neither for Nor Against January 24, 2024

LD 2147: An Act to Remove the Requirement for Edible Cannabis Products to be Stamped or Embossed on Each Serving with Universal Symbol

Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Patricia Buck Welton. I live in Pittston and work at Healthy Communities of the Capital Area (HCCA) in Gardiner.

HCCA is a public health nonprofit that partners with community members to improve the health and quality of life locally. My area of expertise and focus is preventing alcohol, cannabis and other drug misuse among youth and collaborating with communities for youth to thrive. My work includes efforts to reduce youth substance use with a special focus on towns of MSAD#11.

I understand the business of cannabis in Maine is important for this committee. But industry is **not** the point of this testimony. The point is about prioritizing the wellbeing of our youth as well.

The laws and regulations of the state of Maine are designed to prevent underage access to cannabis. If legal access was the only issue, then the use of cannabis by youth would not happen. However, we know that laws are not adequate to keep cannabis out of the hands of our kids. Therefore, we need to also think about other ways to protect our youth from the dangers of underage use.

I remind you there are many risks and harms associated with Adolescent Cannabis Use including

- Problems with memory, learning, attention, doing well and even completing school and post-secondary education, and ultimately job readiness.
- Increased risk of mental health problems, such as DEPRESSION, anxiety,

AND SUICIDE

- These impacts are increased with higher rates of THC – found in medical and adult use cannabis.

Maine High School students themselves say (2023 MIYHS)

- **About 1 in 3** have tried cannabis at least once.
- **1 in 5** tried cannabis BEFORE the age of 13
- **61%** - well over half of Youth **perceive** there is little to NO harm in using cannabis once or twice a week.

In focus groups, youth report they are frequently unsure if the vape they use contains nicotine or cannabis or “just” flavors, and are particularly unfamiliar with the various impacts of edibles – potentially using higher doses or having unexpected results.

So, if we don’t have products labelled, we are not giving them a choice or chance to know more, edibles look like everyday desserts which can make it easier for youth – especially young kids – to accidentally ingest.

Research for decades has shown that information at the point of decision-making is an effective tool to impact actions.

By removing labeling with a universal symbol, there is an increased risk of youth and children using the product without knowing it contains cannabis.

We are talking about a trade-off between a label with a standard symbol against a range of big risks to many youth and children in Maine.

Patricia Buck Welton
HCCA

Email: patriciab@hccame.org

Additional information and references are attached.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.).

<https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/health-effects/teens.html>

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. (2023).

https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2021).

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep21-06-01-001.pdf>

Risks and Harms Associated with Adolescent Cannabis Use

- The human brain is still developing until around age 25- using cannabis has the potential to impact this development (CDC, n.d.).
- Negative effects of teen cannabis use include:
 - Difficulty thinking and problem-solving
 - Problems with memory and learning
 - Reduced coordination
 - Difficulty maintaining attention
- Additional concerns:
 - Problems with school and social life
 - Increased risk of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, psychosis (hallucinations, paranoia), and schizophrenia
 - Impaired driving
 - Potential for cannabis use disorder (CUD) (CDC, n.d.)
 - Frequent cannabis use between the ages of 14 to 21 is associated with lower high school completion and college graduation (SAMHSA, 2021)
 - Cannabis use is associated with higher rates of depression and suicide, especially among youth (SAMHSA, 2021)

Maine Data (High School)

According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), approximately:

- 36% of Maine high school students have tried cannabis at least once.
- 19% of Maine high school students first tried cannabis BEFORE the age of 13.
- 19% of Maine high school students used cannabis at least once in the past 30 days.
- 54% of students stated it would be easy to get cannabis.
- 22% of students stated that their parents would not think it was wrong for them to use cannabis.
- 61% of students stated that there is little to NO harm in using cannabis once or twice a week.

Contributing Factors to Adolescent Cannabis Use

- Increased availability due to legalization and regulations (e.g., retail density)
- Mass commercialization of higher-potency cannabis
- Availability of an array of consumer-friendly products that often appeal to youth (e.g., candy and baked goods infused with cannabis)
- Increasing numbers of adolescent cannabis users
- Low perception of harm
- Perception of peer use as higher than actual (SAMHSA, 2021)

Evidence-Based Best Practices to Address Adolescent Cannabis Use on the Community and Environmental Level include:

1. Regulating the price of cannabis (e.g., increasing taxes, banning price promotions)
2. Regulating cannabis retail outlets (e.g., licensing and zoning restrictions)
3. Regulating cannabis manufacturing and packaging (e.g., banning synthetic flavors, THC-infused alcohol and tobacco, THC-infused edibles that are appealing to children, and including transparency on packaging labels, etc.)
4. Limitations on marketing and advertisements (e.g., limiting advertising with youth audiences)