

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee On Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Jay Orser, and I'm testifying in opposition to LD 40.

I was fortunate to graduate from Yarmouth HS last year because at the age of 14 I discovered nicotine, alcohol, and marijuana. Alcohol was bad and I still struggle with vaping nicotine, but marijuana was the worst. I did 5 months of rehab and sober living during my senior year and I am now 18 months sober and starting to live a productive life. I still suffer from memory issues, but I'm getting better.

Two-thirds of my peers think marijuana is just a medicinal plant and that it's safe to use, but I have seen, among many peers, and experienced personally the wreckage caused by high potency marijuana. It's common now to talk about mental illness and anxiety among youth, but no one seems to ask why there is so much mental illness. I am here to tell you that for way too many kids, the answer is daily use of high potency marijuana. The industry and sadly, too many parents have fallen for the safe/medicinal marketing. If you don't know how addictive and powerful today's marijuana is, you need to get educated.

I know how easy it is to get a medical card at 18 in Maine. I wonder how many 18-year-olds and young adults have cards in Maine. This is a policy disaster because it leads to heavy daily use and dealing weed in schools. Trust me, I know. The other policy disaster for kids is how easy it is to get marijuana. Any kid can get whatever they want in any school by 8am every day. For some reason, adults think that they can push addictive products because it's good for business and then stand back and say, "use responsibly" and that frees them of any responsibility. This tactic just proves that too many adults either don't care about kids or don't understand addiction.

I think back about my 5 years using and the word that comes to my mind is "LOSS." There are many ways to think about loss. I lost many of the things a kid has when growing up, like sports and educational opportunity. I lost my license and the ability to graduate with my friends. I lost my very self as I stopped caring about anything except using. I became so desperate I made multiple attempts at suicide. Most tragically, I have lost 7 friends to overdose or suicide. So far, loss is the thing that defines my life, but that is changing. I am 18 months sober and finally happy with who I am and who I am becoming. For the last year, I have been working with SEED, Students Empowered to End Dependency. I have appeared in our Voices of Hope documentary series that airs on Maine Public and I have presented to thousands of teens all over the state.

It's tough to spill your story in front of people you don't know, but it's also tough growing up in a culture that is ok trapping kids into addiction because it's good for business. This may sound harsh to you, but again that just means you don't understand that companies need kids to use because if you don't hook a kid on your addictive substance by age 25, there's only a 5% chance they'll ever become addicted. That's why starting 70 years ago with big tobacco, the addiction for profit businesses started targeting kids. That's why they designed cool vapes and flavors and why big tobacco invested in the commercialization of marijuana. Please take some steps to slow down these dangerous drugs. The next generation depends on it.

Maine is a hard place to be a kid. Please vote LD 40 "Ought Not to Pass". Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jay Orser