

Veteran's and Legal Affairs Committee

Subject: Testimony in Support of LD40

Dear Members of the Veteran's and Legal Affairs Committee,

My name is Joanna Russell, and I am writing to testify in support of LD40. I believe that LD40 represents a crucial step towards necessary reforms in the cannabis industry.

It might surprise you to know that at the age of 18, I was working afterschool as a bartender. I then earned 15 years of experience at the bedside as an RN, advocating for accurate information dissemination to patients, particularly regarding the benefits of plant medicine. Currently, I operate a small medical cannabis kitchen in Scarborough. The passage of LD40 would decrease barriers to entry into the Adult Use market, though it will not remove all of them.

One of the primary concerns I wish to highlight is the overreaching and costly operating requirements of the adult use market. Specifically, the prohibition on making non-THC related products forces me to make a difficult choice. Either I invest in an entirely different kitchen for Adult Use regulated THC-infused products, effectively doubling my overhead, or I would have to inform some of my current clients that I could no longer serve them, effectively cutting off some of my most valuable income streams. Current medical cannabis law allows me to produce both THC and non-THC products in one location, promoting efficiency and accessibility to both THC and non-THC products. LD40 would allow me to enter the adult use market without restricting any of my income streams as it is required now. Let it be noted, the use of peanuts in my kitchen requires an acute awareness of preventing cross contamination. As an RN, I am acutely aware that poor practices in my kitchen could be detrimental to human health, specifically with nut allergens. With practices approved by both the Department of Agriculture (currently oversees kitchens), and the Office of Cannabis Policy, the risk to the public should be considered similar to other industries.

Moreover, LD40's provision addressing the requirement of IIC cards on the adult use side of law resonates with me. It is crucial to maintain consistency across medical and adult use regulations however, If RIC card requirements are removed on the adult use side, similar measures should be applied to the medical side with removal of the equivalent RIC cards to ensure fairness and cohesion in the regulatory framework.

Additionally, I would like to draw attention to the employment landscape within cannabis. In many cases, certain roles within kitchens in particular demand no specific training or specialized skills and often do not involve direct contact with cannabis. These positions, such as bag stamping, package sticker application, dishwashing, and operating safe counter-top machinery, offer valuable opportunities for 18-20 year-olds to secure well-paying jobs, much like my own experience serving beverages at the age of 18.

Just as an 18-20 year-old cashier at a grocery store can handle transactions involving alcoholic beverages, I believe that responsible employment practices can extend to cannabis-related roles. However, the current regulatory environment imposes limitations on hiring practices, hindering my ability to hire entry level employees appropriately for simple. This issue becomes especially pertinent given federal regulations and tax codes, which further restrict my income earning potential, making it challenging to pay even a minimum wage to myself.

Addressing these concerns would not only open up job opportunities for young adults but also enable businesses to pay reasonable wages for roles that require minimal skills. It is my hope that LD40 can be a catalyst for fostering an inclusive and economically viable environment within the cannabis industry.

LD40 is a crucial first step, acknowledging that further reform will be required in the future. The bill addresses a broad range of overregulation that contributes to the stigma surrounding the cannabis industry. This stigma, coupled with excessive regulatory measures, significantly impacts the cost of doing business, making it challenging for legal businesses to compete with the illicit market.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to consider the provisions outlined in LD40 as a means to reduce overregulation, encourage fair competition, and eliminate unnecessary barriers to entry in the cannabis industry. I appreciate your dedication to thoughtful legislation, and I believe that LD40 is a positive step towards fostering a more transparent and inclusive environment for cannabis businesses.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanna Russell
Norumbega Provisions