



Mark Barnett
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To the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,
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LD 584: OUGHT TO PASS

My name is Mark Barnett. I'm a resident of Auburn, the owner of an Adult Use retail store in Portland, and the Policy Director for the Maine Craft Cannabis Association. On behalf of our Association I am submitting this testimony in favor of LD 584: An Act to Make the Director of the Office of Cannabis Policy an Appointed Position Subject to Confirmation by the Legislature. In our view, this bill is part of the evolution of our relationship with the cannabis plant following legalization, as we move away from stigma and away from economies—both commercial and political—built around its prohibition.

At present, the regulatory environment and the ecosystem of 'experts' that have captured that environment in the cannabis industry are uniquely skewed away from 'plant-touching' real-world experience with cannabis and skewed towards policing and restricting the activity of citizens and businesses even in 'legal' states. In short, nobody in the positions of power has any experience with the actual business of cannabis. This bill will directly help to address that by introducing a strong voice for the people in the choice of leadership for our current regulatory institutions.

We see no impetus for this situation to change so long as the Executive Branch enjoys wide-sweeping powers over the fundamental, day-to-day lives of cannabis businesses and consumers. These powers over so many of our industry's activities--concentrated in the hands of just a few--are uniquely unchecked. Further, with the excuse that the plant is federally illegal, attempts to democratize the policies of this industry are met with stiff resistance and at times institutional disdain.

This is a product, in our view, of the lack of public participation in these key conversations, and of the lack of oversight from the people's Legislature. It is a large part of why advocates, as small businesses and consumers, have to volunteer so much time and energy every year to fight so many battles big and small through the legislative process. Our regulators are distant from public opinion and often hostile towards our input in the regulation of our industry. This creates an antagonistic environment which, fundamentally, doesn't work well for the industry, the consumer, or the State of Maine.



While there is no 'silver bullet', someday we certainly won't need an Office of Cannabis Policy. It should and shall be regulated as the varying different types of commerce contained within it: agriculture, retail, manufacturing, baking, staffing, transport, etc. Until we get to that day, however, we certainly don't need to place such potent weapons in the hands of those that staff the OCP nor in the hands of people who view their job as controlling a 'dangerous' problem. 'Cannabis' is neither dangerous nor new. We ought to stop relying on 'experts' steeped in the prohibition-era attitudes of the past and bring a little more democracy into these conversations to reflect that.

Sincerely,

Mark Barnett

Maine Craft Cannabis Association