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March 19, 2025

Senator Hickman, Chair
Representative Supica, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 929 – *An Act to Increase Access to Medical Cannabis for Seniors and Veterans*

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to provide information in opposition to LD 929, *An Act to Increase Access to Medical Cannabis for Seniors and Veterans*.

If enacted, this bill will allow for individuals who are 65+ or who are US veterans to be eligible as a qualifying patient in the Maine Medical Use of Cannabis Program (MMCP) without needing a written certification issued by a certifying healthcare provider.

At present, a written certification for medical use cannabis may only be made in the course of a bona-fide medical provider-patient relationship following a full assessment of a patient's medical history, ensuring the opportunity for prospective medical cannabis patients to engage with a provider who has at least met the minimum CME requirements relating specifically to medical cannabis. A licensed healthcare provider review of medical history prior to issuing a certification is an essential step in ensuring patient safety, minimizing risks, and allowing for patients to receive answers to any questions about medical cannabis answered by a licensed healthcare provider.

Potential cannabinoid-pharmacological interactions exist with varying levels of severity or likelihood, and it is important for a licensed healthcare provider to consider and address any possible contraindications prior to issuing a certification¹. For seniors especially, ongoing concerns of comorbidities, polypharmacy, and cognitive vulnerability exist with respect to data on efficacy and safety of cannabis use in this population². Possible risks of cannabis use that may not be as concerning for most people using cannabis could be more severe among seniors due to their predispositions. Continuing to maintain the standard of in-person or telehealth encounters for seniors and veterans remains consistent with standards of care for patients accessing prescription medications and treatments. Currently, written certifications for medical cannabis are valid for up to one year.

¹ Lopera, V., Rodríguez, A., & Amariles, P. (2022). Clinical Relevance of Drug Interactions with Cannabis: A Systematic Review. *Journal of clinical medicine*, 11(5), 1154. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm11051154>

² Lucas, C. J., Galettis, P., & Schneider, J. (2018). The pharmacokinetics and the pharmacodynamics of cannabinoids. *British journal of clinical pharmacology*, 84(11), 2477–2482. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bcp.13710>

MMCP allows for the use of synchronous telehealth encounters for appointments with certifying healthcare providers to review medical history prior to obtaining written certification, which has been an improvement in terms of reducing barriers to attending an appointment with a healthcare provider. There is no requirement to have a specific qualifying condition for patient eligibility that would be a barrier for seniors or veterans to access MMCP. Additionally, there is no statutorily mandated cost associated with issuing a written certification; any barriers to affordability of a written certification could be mitigated for seniors or veterans without removing the requirement for the bona-fide patient-provider relationship.

In conclusion, Maine CDC values the role of patient-provider relationships, in-person or telehealth consultations, and medical history review prior to issuing written certifications for medical cannabis to protect the health and safety of patients opting to use cannabis in place of or in addition to prescription medication. Ensuring a role for a medical provider provides for the opportunity for patients to receive important education around cannabis by a trusted source and reduces the risks associated with contraindications for use. LD 929 removes these safeguards for vulnerable populations. For these reasons, Maine CDC opposes this bill.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Puthiery Va".

Puthiery Va
Director
Maine Center for Disease Control
Maine Department of Health and Human Services