

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In support of LD 104 "An Act to Protect the Health of Medical Cannabis Patients and Streamline the Mandatory Testing of Cannabis" and LD 1847 "An Act to Institute Testing and Tracking of Medical Use Cannabis and Cannabis Products Similar to Adult Use Cannabis and Cannabis Products, Dedicate a Portion of the Adult Use Cannabis Sales and Excise Tax to Medical Use Cannabis Programs and Create a Study Group"

May 5, 2025

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA). MCA advocates for sound public policies and best practices that improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families.

I am testifying in support of LD 1847 and LD 104, which would prioritize efforts to reduce unsafe youth cannabis consumption and require testing and tracking in Maine's Medical Cannabis Program.

Nearly 1 in 5 Maine high schoolers currently use cannabis. That's especially concerning given that today's cannabis products can contain levels of THC as high as 90%. Also concerning is a trend for use in younger teens (ages 12-14). In 2023, compared to 2021, middle school students were more likely to report having used marijuana and alcohol for the first time. Both middle and high school students were more likely to report that accessing marijuana and alcohol would be "sort of easy," or "very easy." (Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2023)

Higher potency cannabis can alter adolescent brain development, and increase risk of anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses like schizophrenia (US CDC 2024). Pediatricians and psychiatrists warn about increases in people experiencing mental illness that may be associated with cannabis use. (The New York Times, As America's Marijuana Use Grows, So Do The Harms). Yet more than 60% of Maine high schoolers believe there is little to no risk of using cannabis 1-2 times a week (2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey Data).

Young children are also experiencing the harmful effects of a lack of testing and consumer protections for cannabis in Maine. In 2024, the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel reported to the Health and Human Services Committee that the number of children [in Maine] who have accidentally ingested drugs has more than tripled in the last three years. Half of last year's 94 cases involved cannabis. Meanwhile, the Northern New England Poison Control Center reported 71 calls last year of child poisonings involving cannabis. Almost three out of every five reports were children aged

5 and under. (Maine Public, Accidental drug ingestions in Maine children has tripled since 2020)

With increased availability, increased use, and with packaging and presentation often mimicking candy and foods that are appealing to young children, there has been an increase in the number of accidental ingestions among the pediatric population [in states where marijuana has been legalized]. In addition to risks from acute ingestion/intoxication, there is also significant potential for permanent neuropsychiatric changes with use in childhood. (Journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians, Marijuana use in children: An update focusing on pediatric tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol use)

Out of more than 30 states with medical cannabis programs, Maine is the only one that does not require testing. According to the 2023 Maine Office of Cannabis Policy's report *Harmful Contaminants in Maine's Medical Cannabis Program*, 42% of medical cannabis tested had at least one contaminant that would have failed testing in the Adult Use Cannabis Program. Testing cannabis is a matter of safety for consumers that the product they are consuming is contaminant-free and has accurate potency. This is especially important for the health and development of youth and young adults.

We need policies that increase consumer safety protections (especially for our youngest and unintentional consumers) and reduce high-risk youth cannabis use. LDs 104 and 1847 would help achieve this by:

- Establishing a maximum potency of THC in edible products in the Medical Cannabis Program similar to what's already in place in the Adult Use Program.
- Forming a study group to examine youth cannabis use and evidence-based ways to prevent and reduce high-risk use.
- Diverting a portion of the current Adult Use cannabis taxes toward public health and safety awareness and education.
- Requiring that edible gummies sold in the Adult Use Program that aren't stamped or embossed with the Universal Symbol be sold in blister packaging to reduce the risk of accidental ingestion.

I respectfully request you to vote LD 1847 and LD 104 "Ought to Pass" to help ensure transparency and safety in Maine's cannabis industry. These bills make much needed changes that are critical to ensure the health and safety of Maine children and youth.

Thank you.