

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

My name is David Packhem and I am the Executive Director of Students Empowered to End Dependency (SEED) and the Executive Producer of the “Voices of Hope” documentary series. I am testifying in favor of LD 1847 and LD 104, which will require testing/tracking in Maine’s Medical Cannabis Program and prioritize efforts to reduce teen cannabis use.

In my view, Maine’s regulatory policies regarding cannabis have favored the cannabis industry and ignored a science-based approach to preserve public health. As evidence, I suggest the following policies have resulted in direct harm to Maine’s youth as well as public health in general and will continue to hinder goals for a growing and safe workforce.

1. Maine hired a Director for the Office of Cannabis Policy (OCP), reporting to the state treasury, who believes that marijuana revenue in Maine, (PPH 1/9/23) *“reflects the significant economic impact that legal cannabis continues to have in the communities that have opted into the system.” “The system is creating jobs, helping revitalize communities, and having a positive economic impact on businesses that help the industry function.” “More communities are recognizing this potential and are leaving behind outdated stigma about this industry.”* **There was no mention of Public Health concerns in this interview.**
2. Instead of Health and Human Services taking responsibility for regulation, Maine has allowed cannabis industry advocates to gain committee control, allowing industry lobbyists to dictate the regulatory process.
3. The OCP has allowed for, if not promoted, the sale of unlimited doses of “medicinal cannabis” for any “medical” reason, despite knowing that all peer reviewed research indicates that cannabis has limited medical uses and no research shows any benefits of using more than a maximum dose of 10mg per day. SEED’s informal surveys indicate that many students routinely use more than 100mg per day.
4. OCP set up a network of “Caregivers” to sell concentrated high potency THC in kid-friendly devices. They have made it easy for children of any age to obtain a medical marijuana card with parental approval. Parental approval is not needed after they turn 18. There is no record of the number of teens who have med cards. OCP endorsed LD 40 making it easier to market to kids.
5. Maine has ignored the explosion of science showing brain damage caused by high potency THC, especially among adolescents. The following NIH study reports 80 brain scan studies showing brain damage to adolescents using marijuana. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5494836/>
6. Maine ignores the thousands of Maine teens who are overdosing on cannabis, which they call “greening out.” Most common symptoms are psychosis and hyperemesis. The vast majority of kids just ride it out. A 2022 survey of 12 Maine Health hospitals reported 5,258 ER admissions due to cannabis overdose, 26% were under age 18, and this demographic was 53% higher than 2021, making it the fastest growing demographic.
7. Maine ignores the link between cannabis use and future use of opioids. Research indicates that the number one factor associated with developing an opioid use disorder is marijuana use before age 18, [Understanding Opioid Use Disorder \(OUD\) using tree-based classifiers- ScienceDirect](#) and that marijuana use was the number one predictor of whether teens also abused opioids in the past month, (CDC 2019 Youth Risk Behavioral Study).
8. Maine’s promotion of marijuana has resulted in two-thirds of teens thinking that marijuana is safe to use. As a direct result, at least 1 in 4 high school seniors are using marijuana, and our informal surveys indicate that most of them use every day. It’s not surprising that use among HS Seniors mirrors Maine’s adult use. High doses of THC has increased rates of addiction. For the first time, daily cannabis use surpasses daily alcohol use in the US.

Maine teen mental health metrics are abysmal. Nine percent of Maine’s teens attempt suicide. Maine is 15th in the nation for teen suicide. These statistics are staggering. The state collects this data, and yet little effort is made to alert parents. Maine’s educational performance has plummeted after being near the top in the nation just 10 years ago. Maine’s workforce participation rate is at an all-time low. The availability of high potency THC isn’t the sole cause of these problems, but it certainly isn’t helping. Addiction for profit businesses like cannabis have merged modern science and technology to hijack the dopamine circuits of our youth. They know a developing brain is most vulnerable to addiction and moderate use does not drive profitability. The devastation to Maine’s youth is witnessed by our SEED team and educators throughout the state. The fate of Maine’s future is at risk. Please support LD 1847 and LD 104.

David Packhem