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LD 104

Dear Esteemed Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee,

As a passionate advocate for equity, accessibility, and social justice, I stand before you to vehemently oppose LD 104, a bill that, under the guise of protecting medical cannabis patients and streamlining testing, perpetuates systemic inequities, undermines marginalized communities, and threatens the economic empowerment of small businesses in Maine's medical cannabis program. Furthermore, the troubling financial ties of John Hudak, Director of the Office of Cannabis Policy (OCP), to the consulting firm Freedman & Koski and METRC, the state's contracted track-and-trace provider, cast a shadow of cronyism and erode public trust in our progressive values of transparency and fairness.

For patients, many of whom are low-income, disabled, or from historically disenfranchised communities—LD 104's mandatory testing requirements, outlined in 22 MRSA §2429-E, represent a devastating blow to equitable access to healthcare. By mandating exhaustive testing for contaminants like metals, pesticides, and microbes across diverse matrices (cannabis flower, concentrates, and products), this bill will skyrocket costs for registered caregivers and dispensaries. These costs will disproportionately burden patients who rely on affordable, plant-based medicine to manage chronic conditions, exacerbating health disparities and violating the principles of inclusive healthcare access. The bill's convoluted testing protocols and potential bottlenecks at testing facilities further risk delaying product availability, stripping patients of their fundamental right to timely, compassionate care.

Small businesses, particularly registered caregivers and small-scale manufacturing facilities—often operated by women, people of color, or rural entrepreneurs—face existential threats under LD 104's oppressive regulatory framework. The mandatory testing, daily inventory tracking, and six-year record-keeping mandates (22 MRSA §2430-J) impose crushing financial and administrative burdens, stifling economic opportunity and innovation. Small caregivers, already stretched thin, will struggle to navigate costly audits and labyrinthine sampling protocols (22 MRSA §2429-G). This top-down, one-size-fits-all approach favors corporate, well-funded entities, perpetuating economic injustice and dismantling the diverse, community-driven ecosystem that empowers Maine's medical cannabis caregivers. Such policies betray our commitment to uplifting small businesses as engines of inclusive growth.

Adding to this injustice are the deeply troubling financial connections of OCP Director John Hudak to Freedman & Koski and METRC. Hudak, co-founder of Freedman & Koski, oversaw the firm's receipt of \$630,000 from Maine between 2019 and 2022 to shape cannabis regulations—a clear conflict of interest. His former business partner, Lewis Koski, now serves as Chief Strategy Officer at METRC, which secured a \$890,000 contract amendment in 2023 under Hudak's leadership, without his recusal despite their prior relationship. This reeks of cronyism and corporate capture, undermining the democratic principles of accountability and transparency. LD 104's expansion of METRC's role to include medical cannabis caregivers (22 MRSA §2430-J) threatens to funnel public funds to Hudak's former associates while saddling small caregivers with additional costs. Even if Hudak claims no current financial ties to METRC, the appearance of impropriety erodes the trust of Maine's progressive communities who demand ethical governance.

In stark contrast, the Maine Department of Agriculture's approach to regulating frozen desserts exemplifies a just and equitable model. For a mere \$50 yearly license fee, frozen dessert producers benefit from state-conducted safety testing, with no burden for sample collection or testing costs placed on businesses. This progressive policy ensures consumer safety while fostering an inclusive environment for small producers to thrive. LD 104, however, thrusts the entire financial and logistical weight of testing and tracking onto caregivers, creating a regressive system that marginalizes

small businesses and stifles economic diversity.

Proposed Solution; To advance social equity and economic justice, the OCP must reject LD 104's burdensome mandates and adopt a third-party, randomized testing program to audit products at the point of sale, modeled after the Department of Agriculture's inclusive framework. By having the state bear the cost of sample collection and testing, we can safeguard patient safety without financially devastating small caregivers. This approach would also neutralize concerns about METRC's undue influence and Hudak's conflicts of interest by engaging independent, third-party testers unaffiliated with his former associates. Such a policy would embody our shared values of fairness, accessibility, and community empowerment.

While patient safety is a cornerstone of our progressive vision, LD 104's heavy-handed approach fails to balance safety with affordability, accessibility, and economic equity. The bill's temporary testing waiver (22 MRSA §2429-E) acknowledges gaps in testing capacity but ignores the long-term harm to patients and small businesses. A state-led, randomized testing model would honor Maine's commitment to social justice by protecting vulnerable patients, preserving diverse caregivers, and restoring trust in ethical, transparent governance.

I implore this committee to reject LD 104, thoroughly investigate Hudak's ties to Freedman & Koski and METRC, and champion a fairer, state-managed testing system that uplifts marginalized voices and fosters an inclusive cannabis community. Together, we can build a future where equity, compassion, and economic empowerment flourish for all Mainers.

Sincerely,
Corey LaPlante