



Mark Barnett
Policy Director
Maine Craft Cannabis Association

LD 1517: OUGHT TO PASS

Distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Veterans' and Legal Affairs,

My name is Mark Barnett. I'm a resident of Auburn, a registered caregiver, the owner of a medical caregiver retail storefront in Portland called Higher Grounds of Maine, and the Policy Director for the Maine Craft Cannabis Association. On behalf of my organization, I would encourage this committee to vote 'Ought to Pass' for LD 1517, 'An Act To Establish The Equity in Economic Growth and Development Program'.

Maine has a long way to go in developing a fair and equal regulated cannabis industry, particularly in the Adult Use market where barriers to entry are extremely high and obstacles to successfully operating are everywhere. We believe this bill would be a significant step forward in making this program more accessible to Mainers whose communities have suffered the burdens of the unjust War on Drugs, while not limiting those communities to applying resources solely to cannabis businesses which are inherently volatile, risky, and difficult to operate. Historically, other state programs have made resources available only to cannabis industry ventures, which is both limiting in its addressable population and also lowers the likelihood that those resources will lead to multigenerational wealth as a much higher percentage of cannabis businesses fail than succeed.

This bill would also redirect some of the existing resources in the program away from OCP's slush fund and towards positions outside of the Office that can help registrants navigate the complexities of dealing with OCP's often hostile approach to the industry participants it oversees. We feel this is an unfortunate but necessary direction to ensure some degree of accountability for the Office. One of the most commonly shared experiences in the industry is struggling with needless obstacles and often arbitrary interpretations of rule and statute that cost participants precious time, legal expenses, and as we can all attest, sound sleep at night. It is our hope that the positions of business navigator, ombudsperson, and workforce navigator could increase the success rate for participants from all backgrounds.

Paired with badly needed reforms to the Adult Use cannabis business regulation in Title 28, we hope this bill can help turn that environment around. However, we do view those further reforms as essential if this bill is to have the impact that it could. If we are simply creating grant



programs and adding support staff within the government to help people ruin their financial lives, we will have not made much progress. The Adult Use market as it stands is poorly designed, mired in stigma and statutory hostility towards its participants, and in our view represents a cascade of policy failures that this Legislature must acknowledge and address. Mainers who supported legalization when they voted to pass the referendum legalizing Adult Use did not get anything close to what they had voted for when this program finally came together.

We can all take accountability for that, and work together collaboratively to address what we know now that we didn't know then. It is our view that this bill will be a part of that progress. We must also acknowledge the outsized harm that this plant's prohibition had on communities of color and lower income communities, particularly African Americans, and we support using some of the program's resources to work towards repairing some piece of that harm. We would encourage this committee to consider including expungements as part of this bill's efforts if that is possible as well. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Mark Barnett
Policy Director
Maine Craft Cannabis Association