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THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony of Senator Teresa S. Pierce introducing
LD 1996, An Act to Regulate Synthetic Hemp-derived Cannabinoids
before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

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Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Teresa Pierce, and I have the honor of serving the five and a half communities in Cumberland County that make up Senate District 25. I am here today to introduce LD 1996, "An Act to Regulate Synthetic Hemp-derived Cannabinoids."

The intent of this bill is simple: to protect our kids from getting their hands on synthetic hemp-derived cannabinoids. These unregulated substances have unknown and potentially dangerous effects to the short-term and long-term health of our children. Right now, anyone— and most concerning to me, kids— can buy drinks containing synthetic THC that are available at retailers across the state.

Hemp is an exciting and emerging industry so I want to be very clear: it is not my intention to stop business owners from producing their hemp products nor to hinder the advancement of this industry. My husband founded a small business, so I understand the balance of health and safety regulations with pursuing business goals.

The amendment I've submitted speaks to both of these concerns. In part one, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), working Office of Cannabis Policy (OCP), would establish a stakeholder group to develop recommendations around the regulation of ingestible consumer products containing hemp-derived THC, synthesized THC or artificial THC. There would be a report back to the Legislature in April 2025 with an opportunity to implement any recommendations by the group.

The second part of this amendment seeks to pause the sale of food and drink containing synthesized THC (or artificial THC,) or food containing hemp-derived THC above 0.3% delta-9 THC on a dry weight basis of the derivatives, extracts, cannabinoids isomers, acids, salts and salts of isomers containing the hemp-derived THC, synthesized THC or artificial THC in the food.

As you can see from the above paragraph, this issue and the industry are complex. It will need the attention and expertise of DACF and OCP to ensure that all components of the farming, production and regulation of hemp are taken into account of any recommendation that might be suggested to the Legislature.

States across the nation are developing their own guidelines to properly handle this emerging industry. States see the economic potential for hemp growers and producers while understanding that synthetic derivatives pose a potential risk to the health and well-being of consumers, especially children.

I've met with business owners from across Maine, as well as with hemp and cannabinoid experts to ensure I'm hearing from all sides of this issue. While they may have different ideas about how best to proceed, everyone is in agreement that we need to protect children while also giving this emerging industry clarity going forward.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this bill and amendment. I have heard some concerns about the amendment around how best to "pause" the sale of these products while this work is being done and also with the report back timing. I welcome the discussion, and I am certainly open to changes as long as the overarching goal of protecting Maine kids remains at the forefront.