



**Written Testimony of Ben Edwards in Opposition to L.D. 1996,
An Act to Regulate Synthetic Hemp-derived Cannabinoids**

January 30, 2024

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee:

My name is Ben Edwards, I own and operate the Schoppee Farm in Machias, Maine. We are a MOFGA certified organic 8th generation family owned and run farm that, among other things, grows hemp and creates hemp based products. LD 1996 in its original, and amended form, will make every product we produce illegal, and will put our farm out of business.

I have two very young children, my wife is a teacher, and I share Senator Pierce's concerns about children having unrestricted access to intoxicating substances. At Schoppee Farm we grow hemp to create organic, full spectrum, medicinal products. The products we make are safe. If they were not, you would be hearing a huge public outcry, but you are not. What you are hearing is an outcry from the lobbyists for big marijuana.

I am a big believer in the wisdom of time. We have at least centuries of experience with the cannabis plant with elevated levels of Delta 9 THC. We do not have much more than a few years of experience with elevated levels of Delta 8, Delta 10, and HHC. These compounds do occur naturally in cannabis in small amounts. While it appears that even in large amounts they are likely safe, we do not have long term data to back this up. And in the spirit of this bill, we do not know the long term effects on children. I am absolutely in favor of some common sense controls on products high in Delta 8, Delta 10, and HHC. Let's put them in child proof packaging. Lets require basic potency testing and have labeling requirements.

Cannabinoid hemp is roughly a \$30-billion dollar industry, nationwide. Large out-of-state cannabis companies are lobbying in Maine and all across the country to eliminate our hemp



industry, small farmers, and artisanal producers, in favor of corporate-backed cannabis. This is almost always done under the guise of protecting children. This is simply untrue. It is about protecting their bottom lines by eliminating competition.

This is not just about my family's farm, it's about the ripple effect. Hemp is a real industry in Maine with companies owned, run, and staffed by Mainers. We collectively employ hundreds of people. We make meaningful contributions to the economies of the communities in which we operate, and to the state. We make products that help many thousands of people all over the world. And we are using hemp to hopefully return farms shuttered by PFAS contamination to operation. We have trials growing on our farm right now to refine our strategy in preparation for a larger scale remediation grow happening outside this year at our local airport and at a farm shuttered by PFAS. Please don't jeopardize this work.

- A vote for this Bill is a vote for big out-of-state cannabis businesses.
- A vote for this bill is a vote against our environment.
- A vote for this bill is a vote against the health and well being of patients with a myriad of issues from seizures to chronic pain to anxiety.
- A vote for this bill is a vote against Maine farmers.
- A vote for this bill is a vote against the Maine economy; not only here in Augusta and further south, but in Washington county, in Machias, where my farm is located - the single poorest town in the entire state.

Maine has a history of leading the pack with cannabis reform and not giving in to fear mongering and out of state big business pressures. So I ask you: Please vote against this bill. And please, let's not do this again next year. Engage with us. We want to work with you to create common sense regulations that protect all Mainers, that build trust, and that allow this industry to flourish in our state and beyond. Hemp is a great industry for Maine. For its people. For its environment. For its economy.

Thank you,

Benjamin C. Edwards