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### **Testimony in Opposition to L.D. 2204, *An Act to Combat Racketeering in Scheduled Drugs by Certain Organizations***

Senate Chair Beebe-Center, House Chair Salisbury, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is John Risler, I live in Belgrade and I serve as an Assistant Attorney General and Drug Task Force Coordinator for the Maine Office of the Attorney General. I am here today to testify in opposition to L.D. 2204, *An Act to Combat Racketeering in Scheduled Drugs by Certain Organizations*.

This proposed legislation appears to be in response to a significant issue in the state of Maine: the buying of rural properties and conversion of those properties into large-scale, illicit cannabis cultivation operations. These operations make no effort to comply with the regulations that our state has put in place to allow for the lawful cultivation. Instead, they exploit our rural communities: using the properties to grow their product illegally, exporting it across state lines, and generally making life unpleasant for anyone living nearby.

L.D. 2204 attempts to address this issue in several ways, which include a new crime of racketeering, civil penalties, provisions for the seizure and forfeiture of property, additional regulatory provisions, and a prohibition on the ownership of land by the citizens of certain foreign countries. Many of these provisions are both confusing and inconsistent with current Maine law.

Instead of the creation of new crimes and civil penalties, we need the effective enforcement of our current statutes. The cultivation of marijuana is still a crime in the State of Maine under Title 17-A M.R.S. §1117 for individuals operating outside of the Adult Use or Medical Marijuana programs. Similarly, the possession of bulk quantities of marijuana outside of those programs is also a crime. Our courts already have the statutory authority to impose significant fines commensurate with value of the drugs involved in these illegal operations.

Following the establishment of Maine's Medical Marijuana and Adult Use programs, there was significant confusion regarding the legality of marijuana in Maine's criminal justice system. That confusion has been compounded by a focus on other priorities, including the opioid epidemic and the increasingly lethal substances in the drug supply. Unfortunately, that has allowed individuals to engage in the illicit cultivation of marijuana with little consequence.

However, for the past two years, the Office of the Attorney General has been working with the Office of Cannabis Policy to educate our law enforcement partners regarding illicit marijuana cultivation. We have worked with municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies to address problem properties within their communities. It seems that with each successful execution of a search warrant, we receive more interest and inquiries from those who have identified potential illicit grows. As a result, we are currently collaborating with law enforcement agencies across the State of Maine on their investigations, sometimes authorizing search warrants for multiple suspected grows within a single week. With effective enforcement of our current laws, we hope to curtail this illegal activity and make our rural communities less attractive to those who intend to engage in this illegal activity.

Thank you for your attention to this testimony and I am willing to answer any questions.