

Matt Hawes – Testimony for Public Hearing on LD 40
Maine Legislative Committee of Veterans and Legal Affairs
March 4, 2024

Sen Hickman, Representative Supica and esteemed members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Matt Hawes, I live in Bath, Maine. I have been a legal cannabis entrepreneur for 24 years, a regulated cannabis policy advocate for 15 years and am the founder of Novel Beverage and co-owner of Brothers Cannabis.

I want to take a moment to talk about the history of Maine's adult use cannabis law and how it came to be. You have likely noticed the same group of people coming back year after year, proposing changes to this law. That is because the law is flawed and has been flawed from the start and I think the origin story is important.

The single largest culprit impacting the quality of the current law was a governor's veto. During Maine's 128th legislative session, the Joint Standing Committee on Marijuana Legalization Implementation worked tirelessly just to have not one, but two, pieces of legislation vetoed by the then governor. In seeing the first attempt at legislation fall to a sustained veto, the stakeholders, committee members and broader legislature became aware of what would be necessary to override another promised veto on the second attempt, and the proverbial sausage was thereafter made. The Marijuana Legalization Implementation Act (MLIA) was not a work of democracy as is commonly viewed, with a majority rule – this was a piece of supermajority legislation. Much of what you hear us provide testimony on, regarding both law and rules, is directly resultant from the concessions made specifically to that supermajority. However, there was a lot at stake and those same concessions made way for what you have seen from this industry since. We have opened well over a hundred small, Maine owned businesses and have employed thousands of people. But most importantly, we have given Mainers, age 21 and up, access to obtain cannabis safely and legally – taking hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of cash and cannabis out of the illegal markets that do threaten our young people and communities. For that reason, I would do it all again given the circumstances. However, as important and monumental as it was to pass the original MLIA, it is equally important that the effort to realize fair treatment for legal cannabis continue and LD 40 is a critical step toward that end. But now we have proof that the fears, skepticism and bias that are apparent in the current law are unfounded. This is made abundantly evident by our actions. Our fighting for the opportunity to be regulated and voluntarily operating in the legal, licensed marketplace, and by participating in the process earnestly and transparently. We are trustworthy.

Specifically, please allow adult use manufacturing facilities to manufacture other legal products so we can make every opportunity to utilize our significant investments in manufacturing infrastructure. Having to watch opportunity pass by is painful. Please streamline the licensing and renewal process because that is just common sense. And please address the massive fine structure. Please remember, we are almost entirely small, local businesses. Fines of the magnitude in the current law are essentially license revocations as they would result in insolvency for most of Maine's legal cannabis businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective on this bill and I am happy to provide further information if helpful.

Respectfully,

Matt Hawes