



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

Sheriff Scott Nichols, President

Sheriff Troy Morton, 1st Vice-President, Sheriff Scott Kane, 2nd Vice-President – Sheriff Barry Curtis, Secretary – Sheriff Todd Brackett, Treasurer – Sheriff Dale P. Lancaster, Immediate Past President – Sheriff Kevin Joyce, Past President-at-Large - Mary-Anne LaMarre, Executive Director

March 4, 2024

L.D. 40 – An Act to Amend the Cannabis Laws

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veteran's and Legal Affairs, my name is Troy Morton. I am the Sheriff of Penobscot County and 1st Vice-President of the Maine Sheriffs Association. L.D. 40 - An Act to Amend the Cannabis Laws has unanimous opposition from all sixteen counties.

Five-hundred and eighty-four collective years of law enforcement service has been dedicated to the well-being of Maine citizens from your sixteen sheriffs. We take pride in the fact that the most recent serious crime report identifies Maine as the safest state in the country, **again**, as we continue to track this data which originates from the FBI. Where we differ is our political beliefs. In many bills that may be partisan in nature, we'll agree to disagree and not take a position. The fact that all sixteen sheriffs, from different political parties, passionately oppose this bill is telling.

It's important for members of this committee to know that the Maine Sheriffs Association has worked very closely with the State of Maine in its development of medical marijuana education programs, before the Office of Marijuana Policy was established in 2021. Initially, our staff members would meet with cultivators and dispensaries to work to ensure they were adhering to Maine law. After an initial visit to offer guidance, our staff would return to the business several weeks later to see if the concerns had been addressed. This was an educational program only, and no sanctions were imposed.

Through the many changes of Maine's marijuana laws, legalization of recreational marijuana, and the Office of Marijuana Policy, Maine Sheriffs have been committed to offering support as needed. We've developed a longstanding relationship with the OMP staff and its mission; "To ensure the health and safety of all Mainers by effectively and responsibly licensing and regulating cannabis establishments."

Maine sheriffs are concerned about many facets of the bill, and one of the most disconcerting is prohibiting law enforcement from having access to a recreational marijuana business. Imagine if this same prohibition was applied to gas stations, hair salons, etc. What would prevent persons from conducting illegal activity unrelated to marijuana if they knew law enforcement could not enter?

Municipalities must have the ability to operate in a way that best supports the residents of their communities and frankly, the very existence of legal recreational marijuana in Maine unfolded in

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opposition to the federal government. The very suggestion of eliminating a municipality's authorization to prohibit delivery of any substance is alarming.

Maine sheriffs have spent many, many hours across the hall in the Criminal Justice committee room, fighting for dollars to support those in our jails who are suffering from substance use disorders. In fact, the State of Maine mandates that our regional and county jails provide medically assisted treatment for substance use disorders, which is the case for the majority of those housed in our jails. In her State of the State address in February of this year, Governor Mills proposed an additional 3.9 million dollars to further fund substance use disorder programs.

The Pine Tree Recovery Center is nationally accredited and recognized for their substance use and detoxification services, arguably the subject matter experts when we discuss substance use disorders. They note that repetitive marijuana use has been known to lead to the development of marijuana use disorder, a physical dependence characterized by standard symptoms of addiction. They go on to say that thirty percent of all men and women who use marijuana will eventually develop a marijuana use disorder.¹

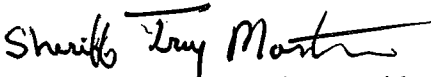
Maine sheriffs cannot understand why we're aggressively fighting for substance use disorder funding on one side of the fourth floor, and we simply cross the hall and we find proposed law to significantly loosen laws around a substance identified as an addictive drug.

Maine jails are the emergency rooms of the penal system. When persons are brought into our custody, the vast majority of intakes are under the influence of a substance and our job is to stabilize them. It's a very different intake experience than state facilities, who receive their residents after stabilization has taken place. While we understand that recreational marijuana is legal in Maine, we urge you to remember that easing restrictions on a known addictive substance is irresponsible when the state is crippled by numbers of addicted persons needing help with their addictions.

Maine sheriffs, all sixteen of us, implore the members of this committee to understand that there are no positive outcomes from the passage of L.D. 40. Please vote responsibly by defeating this bill.

Thank you for your consideration, and I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Troy Morton, Vice-President
Maine Sheriffs' Association

¹ <https://www.pinetreerecovery.com/maine-detox-programs/drug-detox/marijuana-detox/>