



Maine Sheriffs' Association I

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February 3, 2025

**TESTIMONY OF
SHERIFF PATRICK POLKY
MAINE SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION**

In support of

LD 59 An Act to Ban the Drug Tianeptine

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Sheriff Patrick Polky. I am here today on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs' Association. I am the sheriff of Knox County and a retired armed services veteran. I have had the privilege of serving and protecting Maine citizens from several different public safety professions and agencies for over thirty years, twenty-five of those as a full-time law enforcement officer.

Maine sheriffs commend Representative Lemelin for bringing this timely bill forward. Tianeptine is often referred to as 'gas station heroin' as the pills are commonly sold as dietary supplements in gas stations and convenience stores.

Our law enforcement colleagues around the country are reporting that this drug is nearing crisis levels. One reputable doctor, Dr. Melissa Thompson from the Ivy Creek Detox Unit in Alabama, noted that "the experience of detoxing from this drug is like your body is withdrawing from two or three drugs at one time." They are seeing an increase in overdose cases coming to their facility from individuals suffering from withdrawal from Tianeptine, and some states are beginning to document overdose deaths.

Tianeptine is not approved for any medical use; however, it is not a federally controlled substance. This means it can be sold in the U.S. uninhibited, typically sold in gas stations, convenience stores, and online. The FDA issued a public safety alert on November 21, 2023, noting that consumers were at risk of severe adverse health complications, including seizures and even death. Poison control centers report that Tianeptine cases are increasing nationwide; 11 total cases were reported from 2000 to 2013, and 892 cases were reported from 2015 to 2023.

In February of 2024, the DEA reported that Tianeptine is being counterfeited in pill form to mimic the pharmaceutical products hydrocodone and oxycodone and in powder and package form to mimic the illicit drug heroin.

An advantage of long service in public safety is first-hand knowledge and experience. For much of my law enforcement career, I was considered an impaired driving expert, serving as a Drug Recognition Expert and senior instructor on impaired driving detection for approximately 15 years. During that time, I experienced firsthand the Bath salts and Spice epidemics that impacted this state. In my opinion, the information about Tianeptine is eerily similar to the information shared with us before Bath salts and Spice became epidemics in Maine.

We are uniquely poised to prevent the potential chaos and tragedy that will likely result from allowing Tianeptine to remain unregulated by joining twelve other states that have already recognized the potential for harm and prohibited the sale of products containing this substance.

Maine sheriffs urge members of this committee to SUPPORT the unanimous passage of L.D. 59. I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheriff Patrick W. Polky