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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher presenting

LD 929, An Act to Increase Access to Medical Cannabis for Seniors and Veterans

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25, which is most of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to present LD 929, An Act to Increase Access to Medical Cannabis for Seniors and Veterans.

LD 929 allows two groups - those who are 65 and older and those who are military veterans - to access medical cannabis without the barrier of obtaining a medical certification. Older Mainers and veterans would be able to show proof of their age or veteran status - such as a state-issued identification card or VA-issued identification card - to self-certify as "qualifying patients."

This change would remove a significant barrier for two groups who may be more likely to have conditions that could benefit from therapeutic cannabis use. These include chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Despite the potential benefit, many veterans and seniors do not have reasonable access to the medical cannabis program. As members of this committee know, many individuals cannot access medical certification through their primary care physician. The VA does not allow providers to write medical certifications, and many doctors work for hospital systems who also have policies against providing medical certifications.

You may hear that these folks can simply access the adult use cannabis market if they are not able or willing to obtain a medical certification. It is true that, in some parts of the state, it is easy to find adult use cannabis retail establishments. But in more rural areas, these establishments are

often not so accessible, leaving individuals to drive many miles - perhaps an hour or more - to get to a retail store.

This would be burdensome to anybody, but it is an especially challenging barrier for someone living with chronic pain and/or post-traumatic stress disorder, for those living in rural areas, for those who are on a fixed income, and those who may not have access to reliable transportation. Each of these conditions are all too common for many of Mainers 65 and older and veterans.

I submitted this bill after hearing from a constituent. She shared with me that other states have adopted a similar solution to ensure that veterans and those 65 and over who are experiencing chronic pain and PTSD can access medical cannabis. She and others are here today to speak in more detail about the proposal. While they may be better suited to answer your questions, I am happy to answer any you may have for me as the bill sponsor.

Thank you for your consideration.