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**Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology on
LD 1535, An Act to Reduce Illegal Cannabis Operations by Requiring Permits for
High Electrical Usage
April 24, 2025**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology: I am Dave Haggan and I have the honor of representing the people of Senate District 10, which includes three municipalities in Hancock County and nine municipalities in Penobscot County. I am pleased to present LD 1535, "An Act to Reduce Illegal Cannabis Operations by Requiring Permits for High Electrical Usage."

This bill is an attempt to curtail and hopefully end the growing concern of illegal marijuana producers around rural parts of the state. Since June 2023, dozens of busts of these illegal grows over the past two years have yielded thousands of pounds and cannabis plants. Many of these grow operations are connected to Chinese organized crime. Beyond growing illegal cannabis, these operations have also been used as hubs for human trafficking and other illicit drugs.

On top of the dangers associated with organized crime, the product produced can be extremely dangerous. Mold infestations, black market fumigants and potentially fatal levels of toxic fertilizers and insecticides that have been banned in this country have been found in chemical tests of the illicit cannabis. Myclobutanil, which creates cyanide gas when ignited and inhaled, has also been found in the majority of grow houses that have been busted¹.

In essence, these growers have also added dangerous pesticides and chemicals to their smuggling operations and used them accordingly.

Sen. Collins has called these illegal operations a national security threat and a public health hazard because these homes are usually covered in black mold. I'm sure any law enforcement officer who has had to work any of these crime scenes can attest to the deplorable and hazardous conditions found in some if not all of these homes.

These grow house operators are doing all they can to shield themselves from law enforcement. Since knowledge of the illegal grows first became public and gained media attention, police have made plenty of busts.

1

<https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/06/illegal-grow-houses-have-been-entering-maines-medical-weed-market-for-years-even-after-being-busted-by-police/>

Yet while law enforcement is doing all they can to crack down on these illegal and dangerous grow operations, these operations can set up shop elsewhere and law enforcement needs more tools to tackle the problem.

Still, most if not all of these cases have one common denominator – the need to use power; and lots of it. Utility companies are the first line of defense when it comes to these illegal grow sites. They are in fact the first to know about it and when it comes to staying ahead of criminal enterprises, knowledge is everything.

Some of the language of the bill before you may look familiar. It was introduced last year as part of a larger sweeping bill that failed to gain passage. This time, we are narrowly targeting the installation of high-capacity power to residential locations as well as the high usage of power in residential areas. Such usage does in fact represent a potential hazard not only to the home involved but also the homes around it and the power distribution grid itself.

This bill will require a permit from a municipal or state electrical inspector for new high-capacity hookups. These officials will now be the next line of defense in coordination with local law enforcement if the inspector suspects it may be tied to an illegal grow operation.

The bill also enables consumer- and investor-owned transmission and distribution utilities to report similar installation requests for new high-capacity hookups to local code enforcement. They will also be able to report suspicious power usage over a certain threshold, the failure of equipment due to too much demand on a local circuit, or the discovery of theft of power through diversion at the pole or circumvention of a residential meter.

The thoughtful approach taken through this bill uses our existing code enforcement mechanisms to better identify potentially illegal operations. If code enforcement inspectors feel the need to notify their law enforcement counterparts at the municipal or state level, that is the perfectly acceptable outcome we're trying to achieve.

It is for these reasons that I ask you to support LD 1535. It gives municipal and state officials another tool in the toolbox to combat the criminal enterprises that have taken hold in our state. Thank you, and I'm happy to take any questions.