

Testimony of Nate Cloutier

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
May 8, 2025

Neither for Nor Against LD 1365, “*An Act to Allow Consumption of Adult Use Cannabis in Locally Approved Hospitality Lounges*”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Nate Cloutier, and I am here today on behalf of HospitalityMaine, representing Maine’s first-rate restaurant and lodging industries. HospitalityMaine is neither for nor against LD 1365, “*An Act to Allow Consumption of Adult Use Cannabis in Locally Approved Hospitality Lounges*.”

LD 1365 would allow municipalities to opt in and license cannabis hospitality lounges, defined as places open to the public for those 21 and older where individuals may consume adult-use cannabis and cannabis products. It would also allow for smoking cannabis in those establishments.

HospitalityMaine participated in the Cannabis Hospitality Task Force in 2024, and I appreciated the opportunity to be part of those discussions. The task force brought together a broad range of perspectives, and the final report, submitted to this committee, provided useful insights. Drawing from that experience and from ongoing conversations with our members, I offer the following observations.

1. A phased, measured rollout is the best path forward.

To give this concept the best chance of success, it’s important to start with a limited and intentional approach. A gradual rollout allows room to learn, adjust, and build in accountability. Trying to move too quickly increases the risk of unintended consequences that could undermine the broader effort.

2. Traditional restaurants are not a suitable venue.

We believe cannabis consumption should not be permitted in eating establishments licensed to serve the general public.

Restaurant operations are already complex, involving food safety and staffing. Introducing cannabis consumption raises additional concerns, including the risk of cross-contamination when cannabis-infused products are handled in the same kitchen as general food items.

There’s also the guest experience to consider. Restaurants welcome a wide range of customers including families, travelers, and older adults. For some, encountering cannabis use, especially smoking or vaping, in a familiar dining environment may be surprising or uncomfortable.

Liability is a concern. Restaurant employees already have a legal obligation to monitor alcohol service. Unlike alcohol, though, cannabis impairment can be difficult to assess, placing employees in a difficult position without clear enforcement tools.

Given these factors, we would urge the committee to require a separate and distinct license for cannabis hospitality spaces. These should be clearly distinguished from traditional restaurants. A special or temporary event license model could be a practical place to begin.

3. Task force members preferred alternative models.

The task force report showed that both the restaurant/food-based (7 members) and accommodation-based (9 members) models received the least support when participants were asked which frameworks they would most like to see implemented.

4. Licensing caps would support reasonable implementation.

We recommend capping the number of licenses per municipality at the outset. This would promote strong local oversight and create space to make thoughtful adjustments as the framework matures.

5. Leverage state involvement.

The Office of Cannabis Policy could offer valuable consistency and guidance. Without some level of state coordination, we risk a patchwork of local ordinances that could complicate compliance for operators and create confusion for the public.

6. Indoor inhalation and public health concerns.

Smoking and vaping are currently prohibited in restaurants due to existing indoor air quality laws. If the committee intends to allow cannabis inhalation under this bill, we encourage a careful review of how that aligns with existing public health and safety regulations.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions.