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Testimony of Dr. Deborah Hagler on Behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Favor of LD1996, “An Act to Regulate Synthetic Hemp-derived Cannabinoids”

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Dr. Deborah Hagler. I have practiced pediatrics in the Mid Coast region for the past 26 years. I attended Cornell Medical College, trained at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and have a master’s in public health focusing on Child and Adolescent Mental Health from The Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins. I am the immediate President of The Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I reside in Harpswell.

The Maine Chapter of the AAP supports sensible regulation of hemp and hemp derived edible products. Regulation should not be feared; it is a mechanism to keep consumers and vulnerable populations informed and safe.

The current landscape of cannabis terminology and recorded amounts per serving is confusing. Federally, in 2018 the Hemp Farm Bill defined hemp as cannabis plants containing less than 0.3% THC by dry weight. The bill did not distinguish different psycho- psychoactive isomers produced by the plant. Isomers are molecules that have the same chemical formulas but whose atoms are arranged in a different pattern.

The Hemp Farm Bill passed largely to benefit the industrial production of hemp for the textile industry and was not intended to guide use of hemp in edible consumption. Since there was no defined weight, and the bill did not contemplate different isomers- the mg amount of THC could vary if it was less than 0.3%. Various mg amounts of Delta 9 THC can be concentrated from hemp - a “hemp derived THC” that has the assumption of potentially being less harmful than “cannabis” or “marijuana” and is not regulated because the hemp it was derived from was technically less than 0.3% THC. Also, now a different isomer of THC - delta 8 THC, another “hemp derived THC” is working its way into the edible market. It has a reputation of being more user friendly and the amounts appearing in these edibles are variable and not standardized. In addition, in this unregulated industry, the concentrated edibles delta 8 and delta 9 that are derived from hemp are often cross contaminated with some delta 8 products containing very high amounts of delta 9 THC - more than might be available in a dispensary.¹ Are you confused yet? How are consumers supposed to be clear on this without regulations, education, and some guidance?

Delta 8 THC and delta 9 THC differ chemically only in the position of one double bond. We are just understanding its properties in humans, but early research and case reports suggest similar impairment profiles are shared between the 2 isomers.^{1,2} Delta 8 THC can be distilled and concentrated from hemp in high concentrations and since the passage of the 2018 Hemp Farm Bill calls nationally to poison centers and case reports have increased dramatically highlighting adverse effects.

Most concerning are reports of cardio-respiratory suppression. The FDA Adverse Events Reporting System has highlighted several cases including of a 2-year-old from Kentucky ingesting delta 8 THC gummies who needed a ventilator to support breathing for an evening.¹ There have also been at least 3 case reports of psychosis requiring hospitalization.³

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The terminology, marketing, and dosing around hemp, and cannabis products are at best confusing, at worst misleading. It makes sense to hit the pause button on this process to educate the public, and standardize the process, so benefits can be maximized, and harms minimized. The AAP Chapter of Maine supports LD 1996.

1. Simon TA, Simon JH, Heaning EG, Gomez-Caminero A, Marcu JP. Delta-8, a Cannabis-Derived Tetrahydrocannabinol Isomer: Evaluating Case Report Data in the Food and Drug Administration Adverse Event Reporting System (FAERS) Database. *Drug Healthc Patient Saf.* 2023 Jan 29;15:25-38. doi: 10.2147/DHPS.S391857. PMID: 36742440; PMCID: PMC9894081.

2. Wurz GT, Montoya E, DeGregorio MW. Examining impairment and kinetic patterns associated with recent use of hemp-derived Δ -tetrahydrocannabinol: case studies. *J Cannabis Res.* 2022 Jul 7;4(1):36. doi: 10.1186/s42238-022-00146-9. PMID: 35799289; PMCID: PMC9261056.

3. Miller CR, Burk BG, Fargason RE, Birur B. Delta-8-THC association with psychosis: A case report with literature review. *Front Psychiatry.* 2023 Feb 20;14:1103123. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2023.1103123. PMID: 36890985; PMCID: PMC9986552.