



To The Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
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LD 1242: OUGHT TO PASS

My name is Mark Barnett. I am a resident of Auburn, Maine and own a medical cannabis retail store in Portland, Maine called Higher Grounds. I'm the Executive Chair of the Maine Craft Cannabis Association. I have a background in studying highly-regulated industries with eight years of experience with a Fortune 500 company in public utility and private infrastructure finance and policy as well as a combined two decades of experience with cannabis as a user, a caregiver and guide for patients dealing with life-threatening or terminal diseases, a policy analyst, and now as a retailer.

I am here today because we believe that LD 1242 is one of the most important bills you will hear in this Committee this session. It deserves your vote. The future of Maine's largest agricultural industry and one of its largest industries and employers overall is in jeopardy, as are the freedoms our citizens currently enjoy in accessing high quality, affordable local cannabis from the supplier of their choice in a highly competitive and demanding market that has made Maine likely the fairest, freest, and most consumer-oriented cannabis market in the world. Certainly not a market that should be targeted for demolition to make room for the consumer-packaged-goods titans and industrial agriculturalists that have so responsibly shaped American business regulation in their own industries.

Don't just listen to me: listen to the hundreds of patients and caregivers who have opposed the OMP's current rulemaking, both in content and in form. Listen to their testimony. Look at the broad bipartisan support this bill has and know that it is reflected among the average citizen. You are likely to hear a lot of unique and different perspectives today, along with a lot of fear, emotion, and warnings of caution of what is coming if we allow this round of rulemaking by the OMP to proceed as is.

What I want to talk about is narrative. What we are really dealing with here is war of narrative, and a class war. It's really a battle between deep-pocketed rich investors and their local apologists and the common people of Maine. It's a battle between Drug War ideas about cannabis users and cultivators and the real, clearly-established therapeutic potential of cannabis that human societies have known about for millennia. It's an intersectional battle that touches on issues of human health, extractive industrial capitalism, race, class, social justice, economic development, ecology, public health, and privilege. It is a battle in which the Office of Marijuana Policy and seemingly this Administration for whatever reasons have chosen the wrong side to fight for, and that needs to change.



Why am I focusing on the idea of narrative? Because for years in this state, and particularly since the 2016 referendum legalizing cannabis for adult use, there has been a systematic agenda of erasing the stories of our own people, our past and our present, and replacing it with a slick, dense, and impossibly complicated new framework that only the most well-funded firms could ever survive and thrive within. A system that upon any close scrutiny is absurd, and bears no resemblance to any other system of business regulation. A system that revolves around one crucial characterization: that Mainers, and frankly anyone, cultivating and selling cannabis prior to this moment are dangerous criminals who ought not to be trusted nor heard in the crafting of our policy here.

I have experienced this at every level myself, as have many in my Association and the broader coalition of groups resisting the corporatist agenda being imposed on this area of public policy. I have been pitched this narrative by lobbyists who you will hear from today and by the business owners who perhaps see their own future success threatened by the intense competition of Maine's medical market. Perhaps they have been sold the lie that they will be the chosen ones. As for the corporate lobbyists representing multi-state operators like Curaleaf, and the corporate consultants who have moved from attempted sabotage of our economy to the greener pastures of sabotaging our national cannabis economy for team Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol? It's no wonder that these are, on balance, the only voices you will hear supporting this regulatory agenda. They are after all its architects and beneficiaries. And it seems they have been extremely successful in influencing our regulators and turning them against our own people. It is beyond time for a reckoning with this truth. LD 1242 provides a vehicle for doing just that. This is a reckoning without which we cannot heal our divisions and cannot move forward on the best path for our state and its people. It's time for us all to stop kow-towing in fear and assert ourselves to create a better way.

LD 1242 blocks the legally questionable, Big-Brother style authoritarianism that animates the Proposed Rules and the Adult Use program that they are largely copied from. LD 1242 can end the hostage taking and the doubletalk. It forces us to breathe, and recognize that this is not a routine technical moment in our history. Even the most cursory review of the landscape makes that crystal clear. I along with my fellow members and coalition partners am more than willing to be a resource and spend whatever time this Committee needs to understand that landscape. Thank you for your time this morning.