

Patricia Callahan
Augusta

Thank you for this opportunity to testify against LD 1242. I am going to speak quite candidly today, but respectfully ask you to listen with what Dr. King called a thinking heart and a feeling mind to understand my candor.

Even allowing for legislative license, the use of the word emergency on this proposal is offensive given the numerous actual crises compromising the health and safety of vulnerable populations in Maine. I could write an entire book about the issues currently overwhelming our part-time legislature, some decades old.

To illuminate my point:

Last March my geriatric, brain-injured mother had to be psychiatrically hospitalized for nine days due to toxic levels of THC. I had bought an unlabeled bottle of tincture that was supposed to be CBD but turned out to be highly concentrated THC. Sadly, we couldn't figure out why her CBD doses seemed to make her more distressed instead of less until the toxicity rendered her behavior beyond control.

During this experience I learned that patients were still waiting 12-24 hours in ER for the crisis evaluation necessary for admission – the clinicians literally rolled their eyes in disgust when we talked about it --and that community crisis workers aren't trained to use the word safe as part of their assessment, even though two of the three hospitalization criteria involve the safety of the situation.

Talk about emergency stuff in need of appropriate legislative oversight. Unlike the caregiver lobby dominating too much legislative time in recent years, seriously mentally ill people do not necessarily have the capacities or the resources to spend all day, day after day, session after session screaming for attention. That's one of the reasons we're referred to as a vulnerable population and one of the reasons my peers have been waiting over two decades for functional services.

On the list of emergencies facing this committee, veterans are among those impacted by Maine's broken health and human services system. Even open primaries are a higher priority – at least for Democratic members. I'd like to think one way the Maine Democratic Party could've avoided the grossly expensive, embarrassing debacle that was the 2020 senatorial election would've been to allow us unenrolled folks help pick a candidate that had a chance of winning.

However, what LD 1242 proposes – micromanaging a new regulatory office operating in good faith – is unequivocally NOT an emergency. Unlike Massachusetts patients testifying today, I say this as someone who has spent tens of thousands of dollars on Maine marijuana since I smoked my first joint in 1984, including at least \$10 thousand spent legally with caregivers and dispensaries in the last decade. I say this as someone who has worked for caregivers and engaged with them while developing medical cannabis web content.

And, I say this as a patient who has engaged with staff at the OMP. I have found them to be operating in good faith in each experience, including asking them to change a patient-rights concern in the first draft of the proposed rules, which they did amidst other community requested changes. I know caregivers who also speak positively about the OMP, other patients, too, but they fear the inevitable backlash that would result from publicly saying so and for good reason.

Since my boyfriend Denny and I first started questioning certain caregivers about their practices, we've been portrayed as liars and thieves. We've been confronted about Denny's supposed relapse and have been unable to dispel the vicious rumors. After testifying before the HHS committee in favor of standards for the program last spring, I had two flat tires within days of each other.

In conclusion, there are amazing caregivers with high standards for their businesses and their products, but there are also caregivers who want regulations with as many loopholes as possible to enable either unethical behavior or, frankly, bad business models that are doomed to fail. LD 1242 caters to the latter, and more importantly, makes a mockery of all the genuine emergencies within the legislature's purview.