

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

My name is Nicole Hewes and I live in North Yarmouth. I was a public school educator in Maine for 10 years and now work in public health.

I'm testifying in favor of LD 1847 and LD 104, which would prioritize efforts to reduce unsafe youth cannabis use and require testing and tracking in Maine's Medical Cannabis Program.

Nearly 1 in 5 Maine high schoolers currently use cannabis. That's especially concerning given that today's cannabis products can contain levels of THC as high as 90%, compared to the two to three percent THC concentrations typical of cannabis in the 1970s.

Higher potency cannabis can alter adolescent brain development, and increase their risk of anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses like schizophrenia (US CDC 2024). Indeed, pediatricians and psychiatrists in Maine and across the country warn that they're seeing an increase in people experiencing mental illness that may be associated with cannabis use. (The New York Times, *As America's Marijuana Use Grows, So Do The Harms*). Yet more than 60% of Maine high schoolers believe there is little to no risk of using cannabis once or twice a week (2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey Data). More concerning is that it is not just older Maine adolescents engaging in cannabis use; the latter part of my time in education was spent working with middle school students and, while thankfully somewhat rare, a handful of my middle school students were using cannabis – even before the start of Maine's adult use program, which has made access easier.

We need policies that prioritize reducing high-risk youth cannabis use so that our kids can thrive.

LD 1847 would help reduce high-risk youth cannabis use by:

- Establishing a maximum potency of THC in edible products in the Medical Cannabis Program similar to what's already in place in the Adult Use Program.
- Forming a study group to examine youth cannabis use and evidence-based ways to prevent and reduce high-risk use.
- Diverting a portion of the current Adult Use cannabis taxes toward public health and safety awareness and education.
- Requiring that edible gummies sold in the Adult Use Program that aren't stamped or embossed with the Universal Symbol be sold in blister packaging to reduce the risk of accidental ingestion.

I respectfully request you to vote LD 1847 and LD 104 "Ought to Pass" to help ensure transparency and safety in Maine's cannabis industry. These bills make much needed changes to the Medical and Adult Use Cannabis Programs. They are long overdue. Thank you.