

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee On Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Alex Wilson. I am 17 years old and will be graduating from Bonny Eagle High School this year.

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

My art has always been extremely important to me. It's an outlet of expression and a way to cope with negative emotions. After I started smoking marijuana consistently, I lost almost all interest in art and other activities that I previously enjoyed. I heard that marijuana wasn't addictive, and that there were positive side effects, such as a period of unwavering happiness that would last for around 45 minutes. To me, this sounded great, and for a while, I thought it was. But after a few weeks, I began shutting myself in, not wanting to spend time with family or friends in favor of staying home and getting high. I almost completely stopped drawing, and on top of that, there was a lingering fog on my mind that prohibited me from articulating conversations and tasks like I used to. This left me feeling self-conscious and slow, like I was somehow moving backwards academically. It eventually got to a point where I would get home from school and smoke until around two or three in the morning. The next day, I would be miserable, and the only thought at the forefront of my mind was getting home so I could repeat the toxic cycle. There came a point where I didn't even enjoy getting high; it was a temporary means of escaping my problems, leaving me feeling numb and jaded, which at the time was better than focusing on the daunting task of taking care of my ditched responsibilities.

I knew for a while that marijuana was a contributing factor to my problems, but it was so easy to get my hands on, and the idea of abandoning my set routine was too daunting. However, the SEED Program's trip to my high school during my senior year officially opened my eyes, and I realized just how bad things were getting. Around three weeks passed, during which, a slide from SEED's demonstration was stuck in my mind. It was of the side effects you can experience during marijuana dependency. I had almost every single one. In a bout of anger, I grabbed my jar of marijuana and dumped it all out into the trash. Almost immediately, I felt lighter. It took about two to three weeks for me to really start noticing a difference. I wasn't staying up all night, I began to take care of my physical needs, and on top of that, the constant brain fog and slowness I had been experiencing before quitting had begun to dissipate. This change was huge. I began drawing and creating again, and all around, my anxiety had depleted tenfold.

I think people who are using marijuana to cope with bigger issues may need to consider putting it down, especially if they're experiencing major life-altering side effects. For me, my self-worth skyrocketed, and I felt like an actual functioning person again. For a long time, I had lost myself in a fog, and I think that others have without noticing. Now, I can finally say that I'm at a stable point in my life.

Recently, I have joined the SEED speaking tour in schools. We combine our personal stories with the brain science of addiction to help other kids better understand the science of addiction and how to protect themselves. There's an abundance of science proving the dangers of the high-potency marijuana products that are sold in Maine, and many kids think it's completely safe. My hope in sharing my story with you is that you will take steps to better regulate this dangerous product, the same way we would protect people from environmental toxins that can cause brain damage.

Thank you, Alex Wilson

