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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association
In Opposition To
LD 1608 - An Act to Counter Unlawful Cannabis Cultivation
May 8, 2025

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, my name is Rebecca Lambert, and I am providing testimony in opposition to LD 1608 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association's (MMA) elected 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). For reference, MMA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit member service organization and aims to help provide policy solutions that work for all residents in Maine and the LPC guides MMA's advocacy efforts and establishes positions on bills of municipal interest.

We recognize and appreciate the Legislature's efforts to respond to serious concerns about illegal cultivation operations, particularly those linked to large-scale, unlicensed cannabis grows backed by organized networks and including those reportedly involving foreign financing. These operations undermine Maine's legal cannabis market, tax compliance, and local enforcement capacity.

However, while we share the concern and urgency, we believe that the proposed approach to deny a registry card based on the applicant's intention to cultivate cannabis at a site previously used illegally, is not the right path forward.

This policy could penalize well-intentioned applicants based solely on a property's history, regardless of who now owns or leases it, how the illegal activity was addressed, or whether the applicant had any prior connection to the site. A building or parcel of land is not a bad actor—people are. We need enforcement strategies that are targeted, evidence-based, and focused on individuals or organizations attempting to exploit loopholes or reenter the system by proxy.

Many of the properties previously involved in illegal cultivation are in rural or economically distressed areas. Instead of incentivizing their rehabilitation and legal use under strict oversight, this proposal may permanently sideline those locations, leading to abandonment, decay, or even renewed illegal use due to lack of oversight or market demand.

Local leaders agree that Maine needs stronger tools to prevent shell companies or criminal networks from entering or reentering the cannabis space under new names or associates, but this would call for tighter controls on ownership disclosure, enhanced interagency data sharing, and coordinated inspections, not broad disqualification based on property history.

Many small-scale cultivators and caregivers rely on affordable lease options or fixer-upper properties, some of which may have been used previously for illegal grows. Automatically disqualifying them from participation would only reinforce the imbalance between well-capitalized operators and those with limited access to compliant facilities.

Thank you for your time and considering the municipal perspective.