

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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Senator Gerzofsky, Representative Dion, Representative Russell, and Members of the Committee:

Good morning. It is my pleasure to appear before you today, and I look forward to discussing this important public policy matter. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Maine DEA and Department of Public Safety and our opposition to **L.D. 1229, An Act to Regulate and Tax Marijuana**.

Drug abuse, and our response to it, is one of the most important and complex challenges facing Maine and the nation. There are real health, social, and economic consequences to the use of marijuana. The simple truth is that legalizing marijuana will not make life better for our citizens or ease the level of crime and violence in our communities. Under federal law, marijuana remains illegal and the president has long stated his opposition to marijuana legalization.

As a law enforcement officer for 36 years I have been witness to the terrible direct and indirect consequences resulting from illicit drug and diverted prescription drug use and distribution. Marijuana is among them as it does pose a serious drug threat with great risk to the user. The drug legalization's message that that our jails are filled with those that have simply tried marijuana, the so-called drug war is a failure and marijuana is a safe dominates the information that reaches the general public. Do the research and you discover the real facts about marijuana and the future does not look good for our youth and communities under a legalization model.

We know that legalization would dramatically decrease the price of marijuana, and lead to increased access to and use of marijuana, by adults and youth, with the perception that it is a low-risk drug. We also know that the average potency of today's marijuana is more than triple that of just 25 years ago when it was 3-4 percent THC, the psychoactive chemical. Maine DEA has seized Maine-grown marijuana with a potency level of 22 percent as growers continually seek ever higher potency levels. 30+ percent levels have been reported. Today, Maine is confronted with the synthetic cannabinoid that has an even higher psychoactive chemical level than the plant.

Science tells us that high-potency marijuana contributes to addiction, learning dysfunction, direct IQ loss, car crashes, and mental illness. Estimates have marijuana producing addiction of approximately 9 percent in those who use it at least once. That increases to 16 percent for users who start in their teens, and 20-25 percent for daily users. A 2009 study revealed that 61 percent of all people who abused or were addicted to any illicit drug were dependent upon marijuana and accounts for the largest percentage of those 12 years and older receiving substance abuse treatment. Marijuana has the highest levels of past year dependence or abuse (4.2 million).¹ Normalizing marijuana will only compound what we already know.

Science has demonstrated that marijuana is not the benign organic plant that the drug legalization agenda would have us believe. With legalization, there will be an increase in the consequences and costs related to marijuana use: health and mental health issues, substance abuse addiction and treatment

¹ 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

needs, and safety concerns including increases in crime. Will revenue projections even begin to address the consequences? We know that alcohol and tobacco taxes do not pay for themselves. Governments collect \$40 billion annually – about a tenth of what the costs associated with their health, social and economic impact.

L.D. 1229 offers that by legalizing, regulating, and taxing marijuana will in an effect, among other things, eliminate the problem of youth obtaining the drug. I think not. Today, adults furnish and sell marijuana to youth. These same distributors will lower their profits and compete with the government instead of each other in the distribution of marijuana.

Public policy must reinforce and support the understanding that there are consequences for illicit drug use, and that makes the drug less accessible. National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Dr. Volkow tells us that survey results show that we have a long way to go in our efforts to prevent marijuana use and avoid the toll it can take on a young person's life. Our efforts must be focused on reducing drug use so that an individual's full potential is achievable. Maine's public policy must be supported with prevention through education, and treatment for those in addiction. This proposal offers none of that. Instead, groups interested in making money are advocating that this drug simply be legalized without regard to the known consequences of such action and foregoing the commitment to work to rid Maine of drugs of abuse. Maine does not need and cannot afford to make legal a drug that has a high potential for abuse, is linked to health and safety issues, and has significant public health and safety concerns.

I will conclude with the April 8, 2013 remarks given by Denver Mayor Michael Hancock as Denver wrestles with passage of Colorado's marijuana legalization.: *As a parent, I worry about how the increased presence of marijuana in our city will affect our children and our grandchildren. Despite a few lessons learned from medical marijuana, the long-term implications of that industry and the potential for an expanded industry will not be known to us for perhaps a generation or more. There is no denying, however, the potential for a negative impact on our kids — on their home lives, their health, their education and their future. We already know the toll substance abuse takes on so many of our residents. Sadly, many of them are parents. The cost of substance abuse on our healthcare system, our jails and in our courts is substantial. I want more for all of our kids and for all Denverites.*

On behalf of the Maine DEA and the Department of Public Safety, I urge you to carefully consider the implications of this bill, and encourage your vote of 'ought not to pass' on **L.D. 1229, An Act to Regulate and Tax Marijuana.**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, this concludes my formal remarks. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.