



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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### **Testimony of Rep. Scott Hamann in Support of LD 1229 "An Act To Tax and Regulate Marijuana" Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

Senator Gerzofsky, Representative Dion and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Scott Hamann and I represent District 123 in the Maine House serving part of South Portland and a portion of Cape Elizabeth.

I am a cosponsor of LD 1229, "An Act To Tax and Regulate Marijuana," and I am testifying in support of the bill. As a policy maker, I want to be sure that the policies we enact and enforce are based on clear evidence. Is there a problem? What is it? Is this the best means to address the problem?

I've heard a lot of debate on both sides of the issue, but no one has really been able to answer the question: What is the purpose of the prohibition on marijuana?

If we ask people on the street, we might get a couple of answers. First, to protect our children. Well is this the best policy to protect our children? Second, we would likely hear that marijuana is dangerous. Since evidence shows that it is less unsafe than alcohol and tobacco - which we currently allow adults to purchase and consume - doesn't the danger of marijuana lie in the fact that it's bought and sold in an unregulated black market?

## **PROTECTING YOUTH**

Let's talk about protecting our youth for a moment. Since 1971, no less than 80% of high school seniors in this country have consistently said they have easy access to marijuana. UNICEF recently published a report that demonstrated clearly that countries with more sensible marijuana policies have significantly lower rates of consumption for 13-15 year olds while the United States ranks fifth in the world for its high consumption rates.

So if our goal is to protect our young people from the use of marijuana - something I wholeheartedly agree with - our current prohibition policy is failing while the more decriminalized policies in other countries are succeeding to this end. If our goal is to reduce consumption by youth, we should follow the facts and evidence and the

decriminalization policies that have proven more successful in keeping marijuana out of the hands of children.

## TAX, REGULATE, PUT DRUG DEALERS OUT OF BUSINESS

Not only will LD1229 be a major step toward keeping marijuana out of the hands of kids, it is also an opportunity to put drug dealers out of business. Prohibition creates a black market, and a black market is inherently dangerous. It's safe to assume that someone could currently go to buy marijuana - which is non-addictive and relatively safe - and be offered a menu of dangerous, highly-addictive hard drugs.

So from a public safety standpoint, I believe ending prohibition will shut down the bootleggers and put the sale of marijuana in the hands of well regulated legitimate business owners.

And finally, when we bring the black market marijuana sale into the sunlight, Maine will reap the added benefit of generating tax revenue.

As with any policy, we should be objectively looking at outcomes. And in each case, the outcomes are less than desirable under the existing prohibition policy. The evidence is clear on what should happen, but there is still a stigma around what is a relatively benign substance compared to many other substances we allow adults in our society to choose to consume. If we are serious about having effective policies, LD 1229 gives us a real vehicle to replace a failed policy with one that is more effective.

Let's get marijuana out of the hands of young Mainers, put drug dealers out of business, and tax and regulate an industry that's happening with or without our approval; and happening in a way that is less safe than if it were to be legal and regulated. Let's lead on an issue that could prove to be a robust market opportunity for our economy. Let's do the right thing, and let's make history doing it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.