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Rep. Scott Hamann Testimony

In Support of LD 1380 "An Act To Legalize, Tax and Regulate Marijuana"

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Senator Rosen, Representative Fowle and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Scott Hamann and I represent District 32 in the Maine House serving the people of South Portland and Cape Elizabeth.

I am a cosponsor of LD 1380, "An Act To Legalize, Tax and Regulate Marijuana," and I am testifying in support of the bill.

As a policymaker, I want to be sure that the policies we enact and enforce are based on clear evidence. Is there a problem? What is it? And is this policy the best means to address the issue?

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

In fact, serving on the Health and Human Services Committee has opened my eyes to the benefits of *medical* cannabis and how that medicine is helping people in our state alleviate chronic pain, epilepsy, PTSD, and other debilitating conditions. So it is simply incorrect to suggest that there are no benefits to marijuana and to use that mischaracterization as a justification for our antiquated prohibition laws.

You will probably hear today that 1 in 9 people who use marijuana get addicted to it. So let's talk about addiction for a moment, which is something my committee reviews regularly because any medicine or substance (marijuana, opiates, tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, sugar) has the potential to be abused.

In my committee, I have not heard of any medical marijuana patients getting caught in a destructive cycle of addiction, and if there are negative side effects they are far outweighed by the benefits this medicine has on their overall wellbeing. Set aside for a moment the fact that marijuana is clinically far, far less addictive than tobacco or alcohol or especially pharmaceutical opiates. Let's just look at the facts on where our country stands in its ability to reduce addiction.

In 1917, the rate of addiction in the US was 1.3 percent. In 1970, it was 1.3 percent. Today, addiction rates remain at 1.3 percent. If the prohibition policy is intended to reduce addiction, then a century of data proves that marijuana prohibition it is simply not effective. If a policy is not effective, it is time to revisit that policy and adjust our laws appropriately.

While it may be true that less than a 10th of the people who use marijuana run the risk of getting addicted to or reliant on it, what you may *not* hear is just how many people have used it to *alleviate* their addiction to opiates. Well, in our committee, we hear about it all the time. We hear from people recovering from opiate addiction who found a path through the darkness *because* of medical marijuana. We hear from parents whose children are no longer suffering from hundreds of seizures each day *because* of medical marijuana. We hear from cancer patients who can eat *because* of medical marijuana.

In our committee, this isn't the exception. It's the rule.

It is so much the rule that this session we are working through ways to expand access to medical marijuana for Maine patients. However, it is expensive for a Mainer with a debilitating condition to go to the doctor to get a recommendation for medical marijuana. There are a tremendous number of patients who are unable to afford this doctor visit, or who live too far from a dispensary, and who are therefore shut out from the healing benefits of medical marijuana. Opening the door to adult use would allow low-income patients to access the medicine that works for them while also ensuring responsible adults can purchase marijuana from licensed business owners.

As with any policy, we should be objectively looking at outcomes, and the outcomes under the existing prohibition policy are less than desirable. While Maine has made great strides in its work to decriminalize marijuana and also to make medical cannabis available to patients with chronic pain and other debilitating conditions, there is still more we can do. I realize there is substantial pressure to kick the ball down the curb. However, if we are serious about having smart, proactive policies, LD1380 gives us a real vehicle to replace a failed policy with one that is more effective.

Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, as legislators we have one last opportunity to get ahead of this issue, build the framework for a responsible policy, and then let the people of Maine decide at the ballot box whether to allow the adult use of marijuana to be taxed and regulated. If we fail to respond, next session this issue will be out of our hands, leaving us to clean up the referendum after it passes. Or worse, deciphering the intent of voters who supported two referenda.

We can do the right thing. It is time to end the days when Maine adults source their product through the drug cartels. It is time to put the drug dealers out of business and bring this thriving, black market industry into the light of day *within a robust structure of regulation and taxation*. Let's lead on an issue that could prove to be a robust market opportunity for our economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.