Testimony in Opposition of LD 1380 An Act to Legalize, Tax and Regulate Marijuana and LD 1401 An Act to Allow for and Regulate Adult Use of Cannabis

Submitted by Tina Pettingill, MPH

Good afternoon Senator Rosten, Representative Fowle and distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Tina Pettingill and I am the executive director of the Maine Public Health Association. MPHA is an organization that represents over 400 public health professionals across the state who are committed to the health and well-being of all Maine people. We are a science-based association that only testifies on bills when we have data and evidence to support our position.

Our association has multiple concerns about legalizing recreational use of the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States in a state where it is already decriminalized and medicinal use is permitted. As you’re deliberating on these bills, we urge you to consider and prepare for the escalation in social and health costs that could result from creating a third legal drug in this country because there is no reason to think laws limiting marijuana to adults will be any more successful than comparable laws for cigarettes or alcohol. Legalization will increase the already substantial proportion of teens that use marijuana regularly and thus put themselves at a competitive disadvantage in school and life.

We are an association of science. We depend on data and evidence to make decisions, advocate for or against policy and educate the public. When we look at the data, new and old, about recreational use of marijuana, we are deeply concerned.

**Marijuana is an addictive substance.** Children are especially vulnerable, as they are to any substance, because their brains and other organs are not fully developed.

**Marijuana is harmful to child and adults.** Use has been linked to cancer, lung disease, lower IQs and potential impacts on fetal health. We know it is neurotoxic to childhood brain development. We know that ER visits for young children accidentally ingesting marijuana is raising at an alarming rate in states and countries who have legalized this drug.

**Perception of harm is dropping which equals higher youth use.** Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey shows that 37% of Maine High School students in 2009 believe regularly using marijuana is not harmful. That increased to 57% in 2013. When the state passes a law which legalizes a drug, it is a perceived endorsement of that drug’s safety and low-risk.
**Increased marijuana use puts us all at risk.** We also know that marijuana use, and its impairment of motor coordination and reaction time, doubles the risk of car crashes.

In other words, marijuana can be harmful to anyone who uses it but especially to kids. And for those who use it and then drive, it is a public health catastrophe for all of us.

As you consider these bills, it is crucial that you use science to guide your decision making, learn from past mistakes, and act to prevent the establishment of a “big marijuana” industry that will benefit from creating and sustaining a new generation of young people addicted to their product. Though cannabis has been known as a therapeutic agent for thousands of years, more study is warranted for its use as a recreational drug. We would suggest instead of passing a new law that has potentially drastic negative implications for increased health and societal costs for all of us, starting with a study commission that can spend some time researching those potential implications in other states. A non-partisan commission should take some time to truly understand the direct and indirect costs, the public education that will be necessary to make sure our use rates don’t skyrocket, to see what it will take to ensure that our youngest Mainer’s are protected from marketing strategies directed at them, to make sure the funds are available to test drivers for marijuana use and to enforce any potential law that might go into effect and to learn lessons from other states.

On behalf of the over 400 members of the Maine Public Health Association, I urge you to pass a unanimous “ought not to pass” committee report on both of these bills.