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CONTACT: Rick Osborn (503) 986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Senate votes to address Oregon's unlawful marijuana market

SB 1544 creates \$9 million grant program for local law enforcement

SALEM – Oregon has been facing scrutiny from members of the federal administration for illegal marijuana market activity. Today, the Oregon Senate took another step forward in addressing those issues.

[Senate Bill 1544](#) – which passed the Senate on a 26-3 vote today – establishes the Illegal Marijuana Market Enforcement Grant Program within the Criminal Justice Commission. The grant program will assist local governments with costs incurred by local law enforcement agencies in addressing unlawful marijuana cultivation and distribution.

“The best way to protect our lawful businesses from federal intervention is to have a secure, closed loop system. Unlawful producers and distributors are creating difficulties by acting outside of our regulated market.” Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said. “The Illegal Marijuana Market Enforcement Grant Program will help local law enforcement prevent unlawful cultivation and distribution in their communities, which is an important step toward solving this issue.”

The grant program will offer \$1.5 million per year over 6 years to help local law enforcement address illegal market activity. The Legislature has taken other steps, such as seed-to-sale tracking systems, to help prevent the migration of legal product into the black market.

Last year, United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded the Cole Memo – a U.S. Department of Justice memo outlining how resources should be limited in prosecuting federal marijuana cases. Oregon's top federal prosecutor, Billy Williams, recently convened an “Oregon

Marijuana Summit” to discuss what he called an “identifiable and formidable overproduction and diversion problem.”

The Illegal Marijuana Market Enforcement Grant Program will provide local law enforcement needed resources to help address that problem.

SB 1544 also requires that industrial hemp products containing more than .3 percent tetrahydrocannabinol, a psychoactive compound found in marijuana, be sold in OLCC licensed shops. Under the bill, industrial hemp products sold in OLCC retailers will be required to carry a label that clearly identifies whether the product is derived from hemp or marijuana.

“It is imperative that consumers know whether they are purchasing industrial hemp or marijuana products,” said Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “This measure will help ensure that consumers are fully informed before making a purchase.”

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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