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**To:** **Members of the House Committee on Judiciary**

**From:** Sheriff Nathan Sickler,  
On behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association &  
Oregon Association Chiefs of Police

**Date:** May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Re:** **SB 326 (Dash A4) & SB 954 (Dash A3) – Testimony in Support  
Addressing Illegal Marijuana Grow Operations**

**Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Wallan and Anderson and Members of the Committee,**

For the record, I am Nathan Sickler, Sheriff of Jackson County Oregon. I have been the Sheriff since 2017, I have worked for Jackson County since 2006, and I have over twenty-four (24) years of law enforcement experience. I have recently served on the Governors appointed HB 3000/SB 1564 task force and I serve on the Executive Committee and the Cannabis Sub-Committee for the Oregon State Sheriff's Association. I am providing testimony today on behalf of Jackson County, the Oregon State Sheriff's Association and the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police.

Throughout my career with the Sheriff's Office, Jackson County has been a destination location for those engaged in illegal marijuana cultivation. Prior to the passage of measure 91, a great deal of the illegally grown marijuana was found in the foothills and very rural areas of our county. However, post measure 91, our county was proliferated by illegal marijuana cultivation operations, which has led to numerous negative impacts to, and livability issues for, our area.

Some of these issues include but are not limited to environmental degradation, criminal activity such as homicides, robbery, theft and drug trafficking in addition to the primary crime of illegal manufacturing of cannabis. We have documented humanitarian issues, such as inhumane living and working conditions at some of these locations. We have documented cases of labor trafficking where workers have been withheld compensation or even threatened by those operating these illegal cultivation locations.

We have experienced significant abuse of water resources, such as theft of water, and misuse of water rights and wells. We have had fires in rural, residential, and commercial areas of our community, and we have experienced large cultivation sites abandoned after enforcement activities, with no efforts by the suspects and/or landowners to remove the structures constructed to cultivate the marijuana and all of the other the debris, plastics, and chemicals

used at these locations. The legal marijuana industry has also suffered due to the significant amount of illegal marijuana dumped into the Oregon market.

Over the past 17 months there has been progress in Jackson County with regards to illegal marijuana cultivation, however the work is not done. The issues we experience in southern Oregon have also spread to other parts of the state and I believe Oregon will continue to be a target for illegal cultivation for the foreseeable future. I do believe the progress we have made thus far is due to collaborative efforts of our state legislature, state regulatory agencies, county government, municipalities, and community partners.

We still need further deterrents to disincentivize those wishing to engage in illegal marijuana cultivation, such as enhanced criminal penalties, avenues to further protect our environment, to include our water resources, and we need tools to assist local governments in removing waste from our lands. We also need tools that will give law enforcement around the state the same capabilities to investigate drug trafficking organizations involved in marijuana distribution as those in other drugs, such as fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. Clarity with regards to the application and signing of search warrants will also assist law enforcement and our judges across the state when these illegal operations set up in multiple locations across the state.

I ask the committee to please support and pass SB 326 with the Dash-A4 amendments as well as SB 954 with Dash-A3 amendments as I believe these bills will have a positive impact in our communities across Oregon. I am happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Nathan Sickler