

**Written Testimony of Sheriff Nate Sickler before the
Oregon Committee on Economic Development, Small Business, and Trade **in
Support of HB 4139****

Dear Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chairs Isadore and Skarlatos, and Representatives Bunch, Diel, Dobson, Lively, Osborne, Rieke Smith, Sosa, Watanabe, and Yunker,

For the record, I am Nathan Sickler, the elected Sheriff of Jackson County. I am submitting testimony on behalf of Jackson County and the Oregon State Sheriff's Association. I have served as the sheriff for over nine years, I have been a full-time law enforcement professional since October of 1999, and I have been heavily involved in trying to curb the illegal marijuana industry through enforcement, education, and legislative efforts.

Southern Oregon has always been an area plagued with illegal marijuana cultivation. When I started with the Sheriff's Office in 2006, we were removing illegal grow sites from the hills in Jackson, Josephine and Douglas Counties and in the more populated areas when individuals would take advantage of the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program by cultivating marijuana for the black market.

Over time, we made progress in reducing the number of illegal sites through enforcement. However, to do so we had to divide our few resources between normal day-to-day operations and illegal marijuana enforcement. An approach that is not sustainable if the problem becomes too large and it doesn't allow for addressing the cause of the problem, only the symptoms.

With the passage of Measure 91, we saw a significant increase of illegal and unlicensed marijuana cultivation sights that were no longer in the rural foothills, but in town among our more populated areas. The problem became pervasive enough it was referred to as "Green Rush" and immediately had a negative impact on livability in Jackson County. At the time we did not have the resources to address the complaints of illegal grow sites or investigate them but on rare occasions when the county-wide drug team would be able to investigate and subsequently remove a location.

With a lack of resources to address these illegal operations we experienced frustrated residents, land degradation, water theft and misuse,

additional crimes such as robbery, theft, and homicide, we had labor trafficking issues, county code violations that were both operations and drug trafficking organizations. Our rural road systems, environmental health, and overall quality of life were all negatively affected. The Farm Bill of 2018 only further complicated the issue and made enforcement more difficult than before.

The ability to effectively partner with the Legislature to close legal loopholes and receive funding earmarked specifically for marijuana enforcement has been a substantial benefit to Jackson County and other counties across the state.

This funding has allowed law enforcement to respond meaningfully to community complaints, which in turn has helped restore public trust. With these resources, we have been able to address most of the openly operating black-market marijuana operations that once dominated public view.

Since we have been granted funding through the CJC, our Illegal Marijuana Enforcement Team in Jackson County has removed and destroyed over 1.1 million marijuana plants, over 400,000 pounds of processed marijuana, over 700 pounds of Butane Honey Oil, and 645 firearms from these locations. We have disrupted labor trafficking operations, and we have helped connect hundreds of displaced workers with services through U.N.E.T.E.

While illegal operations still exist, many have either moved indoors or are operating under the appearance of compliance through OLCC or ODA licensing. Nonetheless, the funding administered through the Criminal Justice Commission has been instrumental in reducing the scale and visibility of illegal operations. It has improved livability, reduced crime associated with black-market marijuana and provided much-needed relief from what was an extremely pervasive problem in 2021 and 2022.

The funding proposed in HB 4139 would provide long-term stability for illegal marijuana enforcement efforts statewide. The level and consistency of this funding are critical. A stable, statewide enforcement framework prevents those engaged in black-market marijuana activity from simply relocating to counties with fewer enforcement resources. This consistency is essential for long-term planning, staffing, and effective enforcement strategies.

Equally important, this funding supports the integrity of Oregon's legal marijuana industry. Lawful operators deserve to know that they can succeed by following the rules and regulations established by the state, without being

undercut by illegal operations that avoid compliance with Oregon law and regulatory agencies.

Without this funding, many marijuana enforcement teams across Oregon will be forced to dramatically scale back or disband altogether. This would once again open the door for black-market activity to flourish and allow illegal operators to act with relative impunity undermining the state's effort to have a legitimate cannabis industry.

I urge the Committee to support this funding stream for law enforcement. Doing so sends a clear and strong message that Oregon is committed to accountability for those who operate outside the regulatory system, while reinforcing that those who choose to comply with state law will be supported and incentivized.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and for your consideration of HB 4139.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheriff Nathan Sickler
Jackson County, Oregon