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The Devil is in the Details— Cannabis Legalization in Wisconsin Requires a Holistic Approach

MADISON – Representative Melissa Sargent (D-Madison) released the following statement regarding the release of LRB-5095/1, a proposal to legalize medical marijuana in the state of Wisconsin:

“The conversation around cannabis legalization in Wisconsin has taken another turn as some of my Republican colleagues here in the State Legislature have introduced a proposal to legalize medical marijuana— a proposal that is largely pharmaceutical-based. The addition of a few of my fellow legislators in support of legalization efforts is certainly welcome (after all, Wisconsinites from all across the state have shown their public support for legalization efforts time and time again with continued inaction by GOP lawmakers), however, the devil is in the details.

First and foremost, we know that Wisconsin residents largely support both medicinal **and** recreational legalization, and that the benefits that the full legalization of cannabis will bring to Wisconsin far outweigh any other option. We know that there are countless people negatively impacted by cannabis prohibition that would not be provided relief under this legislation— this includes for those without health insurance or who are underinsured, those who have prior drug convictions, those who use marijuana medicinally but do not have a qualifying health condition, and many more. Further, we know that the recreational usage of marijuana is going to continue on the black market until Wisconsin chooses to end prohibition.

Finally, while this legislation may appear to be a first-step towards necessary relief, the fact of the matter is that LRB-5095/1 fails to holistically address cannabis prohibition and help a majority of Wisconsinites— including farmers, business owners, consumers, and patients alike. For example, LRB-5095/1 includes the following provisions:

- Restrictions on consumption, allowing only: liquids, oils, pills, tinctures, or topical treatments (i.e. no smokable or edible cannabis products with cannabis flower).
- Egregious barriers to entry into the industry, with a fee structure that excludes small business owners.
- Excluding those previously convicted with drug offenses from qualifying for a medicinal card or being involved in the industry.
- Not protecting employees from being fired for participation in the medicinal program.

At the end of the day, we know that what our state wants and needs is a holistic approach to marijuana reform that offers the boundless positive impacts that full legalization will bring to Wisconsin. The reality is that full cannabis legalization is a gateway to equity, opportunity, and moving Wisconsin forward, and as a state we must fully embrace cannabis reform in order to comprehensively change the lives of countless Wisconsinites.”

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Melissa Sargent is a State Representative in the Wisconsin Assembly, representing the 48th Assembly District, which covers the east and north sides of the city of Madison and the village of Maple Bluff.