

Written testimony of Sheriff Nathan Sickler

Jackson County, Oregon

Before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Oregon Legislature

February 13th, 2025

Co-Chair's Senator Lieber and Representative Sanchez, Vice-Chair's Senator Girod, Representative Gomberg, Representative Smith, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the importance of continued funding and support to address black market marijuana in Oregon. My name is Nathan Sickler, and I have had the privilege of serving as the Sheriff of Jackson County for the past eight years. I am offering this testimony in support of HB 5005, more specifically funding for Illegal Marijuana Enforcement through the Criminal Justice Commission, on behalf of Jackson County.

Over the past few years, with the support of our legislature and funding, Jackson County, has seen meaningful progress in addressing illegal marijuana operations and the wide-ranging negative impacts associated with them.

The funding provided has enabled the creation and maintenance of specialized enforcement teams dedicated to detecting and dismantling black market marijuana cultivation operations and impeding those who distribute marijuana outside of the regulatory process and outside of Oregon.

Thanks to these efforts and effective partnerships within Jackson County and state wide, we have created environmental benefits, a reduction in labor trafficking and improved community livability.

Black market grows are detrimental to our local environment, using harmful pesticides and diverting precious water resources. Enhanced enforcement has led to the shutdown of many of these damaging operations, allowing for better stewardship of our land and water.

Illegal operations frequently exploit vulnerable individuals through labor trafficking and inhumane working conditions. Targeted enforcement has significantly curtailed this criminal activity, making our community safer for everyone.

With fewer illegal grows, residents have experienced increased safety and security, less environmental degradation, and a restored sense of community. In years past, illegal marijuana grows could easily be seen throughout Jackson County and today, while there are still those operating illegally, the number has been significantly reduced.

Importantly, our efforts have also supported the legal cannabis industry, which plays a role in our local economy. Through diligent enforcement on black market operations, we have created a fairer playing field for licensed growers and reduced the amount of illegal marijuana within the market.

Despite these successes, there is still work to be done. Our specialized teams remain busy investigating and dismantling new black market grows and drug trafficking operations. Without continued funding, there is a very real concern that we will return to the days of widespread illegal operations, environmental harm, and community unrest.

To sustain the progress and protect the investments already made by this legislature, I respectfully ask you to continue funding for these vital enforcement efforts. Continued support will ensure we do not lose the hard-earned gains we have achieved in reducing the number of those involved in the black-market marijuana industry.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting the people and environment of Southern Oregon, and across the state.

Respectfully,

Sheriff Nathan Sickler

Jackson County, Oregon