

Date: June 24, 2025
To: Senate Law & Justice Committee
Subject: Intoxicating Hemp Products – Written Testimony

Introduction

My name is Cynthia Petrone-Hudock, and I serve as Co-Lead of the Pennsylvania Hemp Steering Committee and CEO of Hemp-Alternative, LLC. I represent a broad network of hemp farmers, processors, manufacturers, and distributors across the Commonwealth. I have supported efforts to validate both the farming community's interest in supplying the medical marijuana (MMJ) program with compliant hemp ingredients and the MMJ patient community's demand for affordable, non-psychoactive cannabinoid options.

In 2018, I co-founded a Pennsylvania hemp operation with Jamie Hicks, a Penn State graduate and fourth-generation farmer who cultivates over 5,000 acres in southern Chester County. Alongside Juan Medina, a 35-year veteran of specialty crop farming, our team represents the full spectrum of hemp agriculture—from industrial fiber and seed to cannabinoid production, supported by SBA funding.

Our company grows hemp, subcontracts for processing, and produces a limited line of hemp-derived products. We maintain deep R&D partnerships with respected institutions such as the Stroud Water Research Center (studying soil and water impacts), Thomas Jefferson University (focused on peat moss alternatives), and Penn State (cannabinoid cultivar performance trials). Our advisory team includes an osteopathic physician, a compounding pharmacist, and a certified culinary medicine specialist affiliated with the American College of Culinary Medicine.

I hold an MBA from Drexel University and bring over 20 years of experience in the healthcare sector. Since 2017, I've been invested in the cannabis data analytics space and maintain an active regulatory network that includes John Kagia (x-colleague), Director of Policy at the New York State Office of Cannabis Management—whom I've introduced to Darrin Youker, Policy Director at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, now engaged in that agency's preparation for a potential adult-use cannabis framework, as proposed in Governor Shapiro's budget.

Background and Context

Pennsylvania regulates hemp at the plant level through THC compliance testing, but not the final consumer products sold on retail shelves. This allowed intoxicating hemp-derived compounds, contaminated materials—pesticides, solvents, microbes, mycotoxins—and fraudulent products to enter the market unregulated. The current framework focuses on cannabinoids in the plant, not the safety, labeling, or intended use of the end product, creating risk for consumers and giving bad actors an unfair advantage over compliant businesses.

Key Points and Recommendations

Regulation should focus on the end product that reaches consumers, not impose unnecessary constraints on the plant or processing of its naturally occurring compounds. Overregulating cannabinoids during cultivation or processing risks stifling innovation and limiting Pennsylvania's ability to lead in developing value-added consumer applications—ranging from wellness to industrial uses. The priority should be to ensure that any product entering the retail market is subject to appropriate safety testing, labeling, and age restrictions, safeguarding public health without undermining economic opportunity.

As a Pennsylvania hemp business owner, I've made the deliberate decision to limit our product line to topicals. Not because there isn't demand for ingestible products—there clearly is—but because no governing rules exist around human consumption. My goal is to operate compliantly and build a sustainable business. I simply can't justify investing in a product that might be pulled from the market without warning. With proper oversight, we could unlock 5x industry growth (evidenced in NY), new jobs in agriculture, manufacturing, and R&D, and generate millions in revenue just from low-dose, non-intoxicating cannabinoid products. It would also restore consumer trust and encourage innovation.

What we need is a clear, free-market structure with strong consumer safety standards. These standards should include maximum milligrams per serving of cannabinoids known to produce impairment or psychoactive effects at certain dosages. This approach gives both regulators and businesses a shared framework to protect consumers without stifling innovation.

Conclusion

As Pennsylvania considers how to address hemp-derived products and prepare for a future adult-use market, we must focus on the real point of concern: human ingestion. That means setting clear, enforceable rules that protect public health and support legitimate business growth.

- Define a maximum tolerance level of THC per serving, based on public health data.
- Regulate retail products responsibly - establish who can produce, where and how they can be sold, who is permitted to purchase them and intended use.
- Determine how we will track these markets through point-of-sale.

There are models and lessons from other states that have gone before us. We should use them. In addition, as you consider regulations for cannabinoids, it's vital that industrial hemp—grown for grain, fiber, or microgreens—is excluded. These uses pose no public health risk.

When Congresswoman Chrissy Houlahan visited our farm, I told her it feels like trying to cross a river one rock at a time—except the rocks keep moving. That is what it's like to operate in this uncertain, unregulated space. I respectfully urge this Committee to establish a smart, structured framework that allows compliant operators to grow responsibly while protecting Pennsylvanians. And I offer my continued willingness to serve as a resource to this Committee, the Department of Agriculture, and any stakeholder working toward that goal.