



43 Gabriel Drive, Post Office Box 587
Augusta, ME 04332-0587

t: 207.622.7524 | f: 207.622.0836

www.MaineFamilyPlanning.org
info@MaineFamilyPlanning.org

**Testimony in Support of LD 1159,
An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers
April 10, 2023**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, Maine Family Planning is testifying today in support of LD 1159, An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers.

People who use drugs and people afflicted with substance use disorder are our friends, neighbors, and family members. We want them to live. And the Harm Reduction Health Center model offers an important resource in the work of saving lives.

Maine Family Planning launched the Reproductive Empowerment Project (REP) in 2018 with seed funding from foundations and individuals and agency investments. We recognized then and recognize now the devastating impact of the opioid epidemic on families and individuals, and saw an opportunity to reduce barriers to access essential sexual and reproductive health care services for people who use drugs, are in recovery, and others experiencing significant barriers to care. Today, with support from the State of Maine's opioid prevention program, REP is working with organizations throughout the state, including the Church of Safe Injection, Maine Access Points, and countless partners in health care, to connect patients where they are to testing and treatment, contraceptive counseling, referrals, and more. Working with MaineGeneral, we have made all of our 18 clinics sites for naloxone distribution, and we provide referrals for substance use disorder treatment, but there are not enough detox and recovery beds to meet the need in our communities. Our work with REP shows us the magnitude of need for services that meet people where they are without judgment or stigma.

Harm reduction health centers can help to prevent deaths and mitigate the spread of communicable diseases. Quoting from an article published last year in the scientific journal *Pediatrics*, "Decades of evidence have revealed that many harm reduction strategies are highly effective in decreasing the transmission of infectious diseases, preventing overdose, and reducing other sources of morbidity and mortality among people who use substances, including young people who use illicit drugs."¹ Harm reduction health centers would create a space where people who use drugs can access care and connection to community that is vital to their recovery.

LD 1159 is an opportunity to follow the evidence when it comes to how we can help to save lives and improve health care outcomes and quality of life for people living with substance use disorders. It is a chance for Maine to be a national leader in boldly charting innovative courses to meaningfully address the opioid epidemic. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on this important legislation.

Thank you,

George Hill
President & CEO
Maine Family Planning

¹ Kimmell, S. D., MD, MA, Gaeta, J. M., MD, Hadland, S. E., MD, MPH, Hallett, E., MS, & Marshall, B. D., PhD (2022). Principles of Harm Reduction for Young People Who Use Drugs. *Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-023523G>