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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

April 10, 2023

Testimony in support of LD 1159 - An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers

Senator Baldacci, Senator Moore and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Winifred Tate, I am a resident of Waterville, a professor and the director of the Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College.

Harm Reduction Health Centers are critical services for Maine communities. They prevent overdose death, provide harm reduction supplies, and connect people ready to move toward recovery with access to support.

These services are incredibly important, as overdose deaths continue to rise at an alarming rate. This bill will allow municipalities that are willing to do so, to set up these services in support of Maine communities.

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention currently oversees 18 Syringe Service Programs. Harm Reduction Health Centers are the next step for expanding these programs.

There is a substantial and growing body of public health research in support of these programs, which have been established in 11 countries in Europe and North America: Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. In 2021, Rhode Island became the first state to authorize a site; and that same year, two sites opened in New York City. These programs have prevented thousands of overdose deaths, reduced disease and infections among people who use drugs, and connected people to services. We know from these experiences, and from the body of research collected to evaluate them, that these programs work.

We have a consensus that problematic substance use and substance use disorder are public health problems, that require public health solutions. Maine cannot continue with the tremendous loss of our beloved community members, family and friends to overdose death. Harm Reduction Health Centers are a critical tool for addressing the contaminated and dangerous drug supply in the state, for reaching people where they are, and most importantly, for saving lives.



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I urge you to pass LD 1159. Thank you for your time.

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Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College

The Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College brings together policymakers, scholars and students, providing evidence-based analysis for addressing critical drug policy issues in our state and beyond, and conducts research on problematic drug use and access to treatment in Maine.