

Nicole Gagnon
Westbrook
LD 1159
LD 1159

Thank you all for being here today, and for your willingness to consider implementing Harm Reduction Health Centers here in Maine. My name is Nicole Gagnon, I'm a resident of Westbrook, and I'm here to testify in favor of LD 1159. Substance Use Disorder is a disease of isolation, and this is borne by the numbers of people who fatally overdose by themselves. A coroner's report from British Columbia in 2018 observed that 69% of people who died of a drug overdose there between 2016 and 2017, were using drugs alone. It seems safe to assume that the numbers would be similar here.

Two and a half years ago, I overdosed on fentanyl in my apartment one evening. I chose to use alone that night because I was ashamed of my use, was hiding it from my friends and family, and did not feel physically safe using with others. My mother found me two days later, blue and laying on the floor. My oxygen rate was at 70 percent, I was on the cusp of death, and I spent over a week in a coma. I'm lucky to be alive today.

I truly believe that if there had been a Harm Reduction Health Center available nearby that day, I would have used it. I didn't want to be using alone, but I couldn't find a safer way, and couldn't control my addiction. It was a very scary place to be.

Today I'm 50 days sober, and grateful to be able to testify for this bill. I've been incredibly lucky to benefit from excellent addiction treatment, therapy, and access to Narcan, but there are still many who haven't been so fortunate. A Harm Reduction Health Center is not only a supervised area for people to use substances safely, it's a community space that offers a multitude of other opportunities such as peer support, health screening, and access to treatment. It's a place where people can access care without stigma, and it can truly be a portal to recovery. In the midst of an epidemic with no end in sight, we need to grab every option and opportunity that values and sustains life. Please join me in supporting LD 1159. Thank you.