

Chair Baldacci and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Patricia Washburn. I am a resident and former Charter Commission member in Portland, and a volunteer with the Church of Safe Injection.

In general I lead a very privileged and fortunate life. I have never been a drug user or closely connected with someone who uses drugs. However, I live in downtown Portland, and I see every day the toll that drugs have taken on human lives – people’s parents, siblings, children, human beings who deserve respect and support and a chance to make things better for themselves.

In a perfect world, we would be able to address the reasons each person turns to drugs – giving every Mainer access to quality physical and mental health support, making sure everyone has access to housing and work, ending poverty, building supportive communities and families.

We don’t live in a perfect world. We do, however, live in a world where we can make things better. You, in particular, as members of this committee, are no doubt keenly aware of the many Mainers who are struggling right now.

Harm reduction is an approach that seeks to help drug users along the path to a better life, by helping them avoid preventable and sometimes deadly effects of drug use such as infections, communicable diseases, and health consequences of living outdoors.

You cannot recover from substance use if you are dead. Harm reduction seeks to help people survive and connect with resources to begin to build a more sustainable life for themselves.

I urge you to vote OUGHT TO PASS on LD 1159 as a first step toward reducing the harm that drugs are wreaking in our communities.

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