



MAINE CHIEFS OF POLICE ASSOCIATION

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Statement of Opposition to L.D. 1159, An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers April 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the distinguished Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Charles Rumsey. I am the Chief of the Cumberland Police Department, and President of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association in opposition to LD 1159.

The Mission of the Maine Chiefs of Police is to secure a closer official and personal relationship among Maine Police Officials; to secure a unity of action in law enforcement matters; to enhance the standards of police personnel, police training and police professionalism generally; to devise ways and means for equality of law enforcement throughout the state of Maine; to advance the prevention and detection of crime; to prescribe to the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics; and to promote the profession of law enforcement as an integral and dedicated force in today's society sworn to the protection of life and property.

According to the bill summary,

This bill directs the Department of Health and Human Services to create a 2-year pilot project establishing and operating a harm reduction health center to provide counseling and health service referrals and a place to use previously obtained controlled substances for clients of the center. The harm reduction health center must be approved by the municipality in which it is located, and the bill provides immunity to the State, the municipality or employees and clients of the center from criminal or civil liability. The bill creates an advisory board to provide guidance to the department and requires the department to report to the 132nd Legislature on the effectiveness of the project.

The Maine Chiefs are in opposition to this bill because we are sworn to protect lives, and we have not seen enough data to show that harm reduction centers protect lives.

Maine has a crisis with illicit drugs. We have set records in overdose deaths for three straight years and, in 2022, we lost 716 people. Each of these people had dynamic lives and left behind loved ones. Their lives were cut short, and we believe that our community is worse off for it. We have and want to be supportive of every

single initiative that might save just one of those lives. Like we know - because the data confirm it - that more lives are saved when Narcan is accessible, so we have been supportive of those initiatives at the Legislature.

We are in support of legislation that help people get off the drugs that can wreak havoc on their own lives, their family's lives and the community. But we have not seen enough evidence that harm reduction centers assist people to stop using illicit drugs. We recognize that this legislation is to support a pilot project, but we think that even a pilot project is a step too far. This project would be testing a theory, without enough data to support it, on people's lives, and potentially risking those lives. We cannot support that.

For these reasons, we would ask you to oppose the amendment to LD 1159 and vote ought not to pass on this bill. On behalf of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association, we want to thank the committee members for your work on this Committee.