



Testimony of Maine Access Points
In Support of LD 1159
An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Chasity Tuell and I am testifying on behalf of the leadership team at Maine Access Points (MAP), a statewide harm reduction organization, in favor of the concept and spirit of [LD 1159, An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers](#).

MAP stands in solidarity with the communities of drug users across Maine, the U.S. and the world who have fought for decades for Overdose Prevention Sites and Safe Consumption Spaces. We have deep reverence for the hundreds of Mainers we know and love, who save each other's lives daily while we wait for meaningful policy change. We remember those we have lost to the Drug War and hold them close as we engage in advocacy for the services that they deserved years before this conversation today about Harm Reduction Health Centers.

Worldwide, there has never been a fatal overdose at an Overdose Prevention Site.¹ We can easily imagine the impact these services would have in our local communities: the Drug Policy Alliance reminds us that over 100 peer-reviewed studies have shown the positive impacts of these programs, including the reality that these spaces support individuals in decreasing their drug use, gain access to treatment, health care, and community.² As we live within this public health crisis of increasing overdoses, infections, mass incarceration, and systemic oppression, we see LD 1159 as a catalyst for a needed dialogue. While we support the intention of LD 1159, we would like to invite discussion on potential friendly amendments, specifically the divestment of the Department of Health and Human Services and municipality of oversight with a shift toward community-run programs. While more components of implementation will be determined through rule-making, it is unclear to us if these facilities would be run by community-based groups and how much oversight the Department would be required to have.

¹ Drug Policy Alliance. "Overdose Prevention Centers." Accessed at: <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/supervised-consumption-services>

² Ibid.



We respectfully encourage the reshaping of this pilot to align with the principles of harm reduction, with a commitment that participants of these services would be included at all levels of decision making, program creation, implementation, and evaluation.

We also encourage looking beyond the minimal representation included in an advisory council model and offer an alternative structure that can be found in a community-based model. We have seen programs like the Overdose Prevention Society in Vancouver, British Columbia,³ save countless lives by providing drug-user led, peer-based services, and we believe that can be done here in Maine. The power of Overdose Prevention Sites is not just the immediate access to emergency medical care—rather, it is the ongoing creation of drug-user led communities and comprehensive harm reduction services including drug checking, peer support, safety planning, wound care, employment and volunteer opportunities for participants, among others. It is not clear to us that these services will be provided, and we respectfully urge you to consider these services as you consider this proposal.

It is also important to note that these programs are most impactful for population dense cities. Maine is a rural state and with that comes unique challenges. While these services can build safety for residents of our larger city centers, our rural neighbors—who are more isolated and may lack options for safety as a result—need other innovative services created in tandem to ensure safety for all Mainers.

Maine’s drug user communities are composed of individuals who will be most impacted by these services, and they are the experts on how to find safety with an increasingly unsafe drug supply. We respectfully ask you to look to these individuals, and groups who work with them, as you embark on the creation of models for overdose prevention sites in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and we respectfully ask that you support LD 1159 with potential amendments. Members of our team would be happy to provide more information at your request and can be available for the work session if needed.

With Respect,

Chasity Tuell, Northern Maine Director of Harm Reduction Services

³ To learn more: <https://www.vancityops.com/>