



4/10/2023

Support for LD 1159- An Act To Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers.

Dear,

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Jennifer Sinclair from Winterport Maine, and I am testifying today on behalf of HEAL in support of LD 1159: An Act To Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers.

I am a Harm Reduction manager at Health Equity Alliance. I have been working with marginalized populations for about 8 years now. I started as a Recovery Coach and overtime have continued to move forward educationally, so I can best serve the populations I currently work with. I am an active manager for our Harm Reduction department but I hold many certificates including a CADC, MHRT/C and CRT. My greatest achievement of all is I am a person in long term recovery, I owe this to the wonderful harm reductionists that never gave up on me.

This Bill is very important to HEAL. We have been working with marginalized populations since 1987. At HEAL we choose to call them friends. Many friends come into HEAL and express their gratitude to have a place they feel safe to be themselves. We foster their feeling of safety by continuing to create an atmosphere that meets them where they are. Without judgment or future obligation to anything, till they're ready. Over the last couple months, we have had a lot of friends coming in sharing with us, that people are overdosing multiple times a day and if it weren't for our Narcan they would be dead. We are being told they feel unsafe using substances with friends and especially on their own, due to the increase in Fentanyl. Our friends are scared and so are we. Everyone deserves life and it is not our job to define its greatness, regardless if it doesn't always look like ours. Recently I attended a seminar with Anita Jacobson, from the University of Rhode Island. Where she spoke about Harm Reduction centers safe consumption sites. She shared, "NOONE has ever died at a site." You can find data for this posted by the New England Journal of Medicine, at nejm.org. There have been many safe consumption sites coupled with a Harm Reduction setting in many countries that have been proven to save lives and lead friends into the treatment of their choice. With this space, we allow our friends to gain understanding on using safely, the spread of infectious disease and connect them to many resources. If we want to better our communities we have to change our thinking that people who use drugs are the problem. By changing the narrative, we will change how we support them and our community.

By establishing a safe place for people to use, gain education and connect to resources through a Harm Reduction lens we equip people with the opportunity to improve their own lives. As a harm reductionist we use a person-centered approach while maintaining a readiness to help when the opportunity arises. We provide people with a trusting connection built on non-judgement and listening, where in turn they feel empowered to speak up. Feeling heard after being pushed into the shadows for so long allows PWUD to feel encouraged and like they have a voice. None of this though would be possible if they weren't alive to even try. Harm reduction health centers offers PWUD drugs a platform to stay alive, to rebuild, reconnect, be human and feel like they belong. Isn't that what we all want?



Health Equity Alliance

I want to thank Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services for taking the time to read this testimony. LD 1159 is something that could save many lives and I am grateful to have had a chance to support this bill.

Sincerely,

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